THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE FOR MEN

ARGOSY

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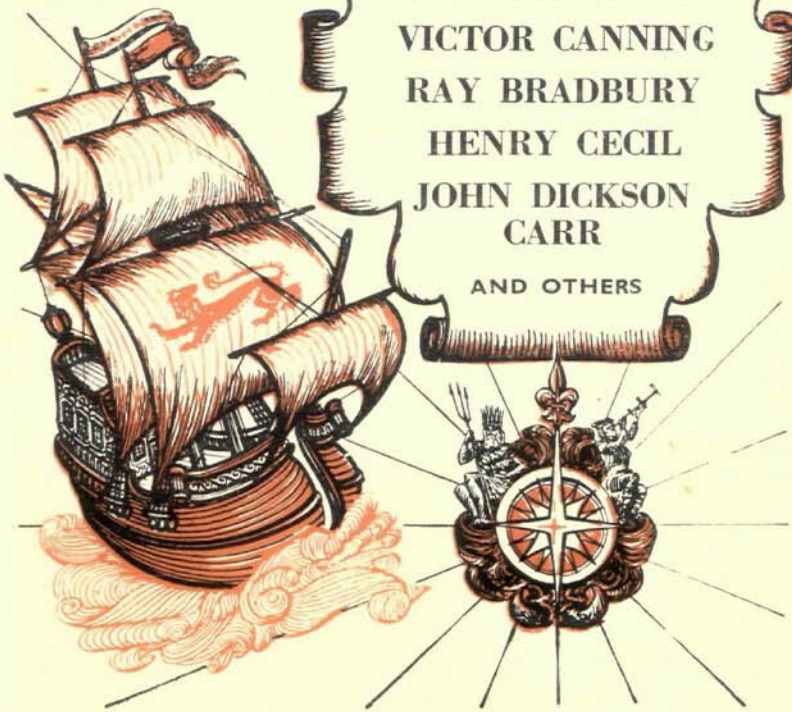

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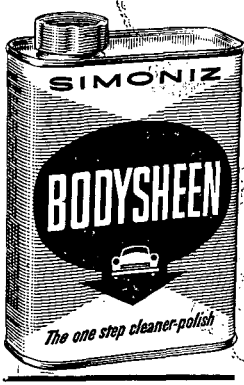

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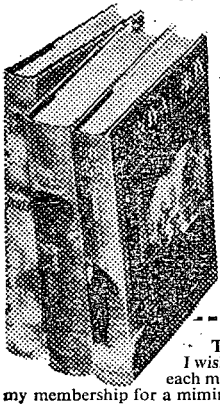

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ARGOSY

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The Ship

A SHIP from Valparaiso came
And in the Bay her sails were furled;
She brought the wonder of her name,
And tidings from a sunnier world.

O you must voyage far if you
Would sail away from gloom and wet,
And see beneath the Andes blue
Our white, umbrageous city set.

But I was young and would not go;
For I believed when I was young
That somehow life in time would show
All that was ever said or sung.

Over the golden pools of sleep
She went long since with gilded spars;
Into the night-empurpled deep,
And traced her legend on the stars.

But she will come for me once more,
And I shall see that city set,
The mountainous, Pacific shore—
By God, I half believe it yet!

OLIVER ST. JOHN GOGARTY

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BATTLE OF FLOWERS

"I'm afraid," said Tim
"there's going to be the devil to pay"

by RICHARD STERN

TIM McCOY came home early on this Friday afternoon. He put his car in the garage and went into the garden to admire his roses and pansies. But what he saw was a snail, and then another, and yet a third. He took off his coat and pushed his hat back on his head and got down on his knees to do battle. It was thus that Joe, the McCoy cat, found him.

Joe's expression was sombre; his bearing indicated dignity outraged. He sat down and looked at Tim.

"Hullo," Tim said. He found another snail, this one hiding among the narcissi; he seized it and dealt with it savagely.

Joe watched without enthusiasm. He spoke once in a querulous voice. He waited.

"Bad-tempered today, that it?" Tim said. He reached out to scratch Joe's neck, but he did not look away from the flowers. He stood up. "We'll pick some for the house."

Joe spoke for the second time. It could have been a warning; it probably was not. At any rate, Tim ignored it.

It was a little difficult, with all the pansies, and his coat over his arm, to get the back door open. He said hullo to Cook, who was standing at the sink. He got no reply. Cook's temper in the afternoon was always uncertain.

He went on, humming to himself, through the pantry and the dining-room, Joe following him.

To Philippa, his wife, who was bending over the large corner table in the living-room, he said, "I got away early." He kissed the back of her neck.

She turned slowly. She saw Joe and she pointed her finger. "I thought I told you to stay outside."

"Hey," Tim said, "hey." He stood there, smiling, his hands filled with pansies. "What's up?"

And then he saw what was on the table and he moved forward a step or two and bent down close.

It was a shallow bowl filled with pebbles, from which protruded a few more or less naked twigs. He examined it.

"I give up," He looked at Philippa. "What is it?" Then

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he remembered. "I thought it was Japanese *flower*-arranging this Slocombe woman talked you into, you and the others."

Joe said something and Philippa said, "You be quiet." She looked at Tim. "It was. It is." In her tone there was defiance; in her expression there was something else.

Tim said, "Oh." He looked at the bowl again. "Sort of—er—interesting." He smiled at Philippa.

"Until *your* cat and *your* monkey decided to rearrange it."

"Oh," Tim said again. "Well, no real harm done, is there? I mean, you've got the twigs stuck back in and—it looks fine."

It occurred to him that he was blundering around in unknown territory. He held out his hands to her. "I picked these for you. You can arrange them, sort of poke them in around the twigs, maybe, and . . ." He let it run down there. At least in silence there was a certain safety. Or was there? He saw no softening in Philippa's expression.

"It took me three hours to arrange this piece," she said. "You don't just stick things in—"

"A figure of speech. Not important."

She ignored him. "Your monkey is shut in the bathroom," she said and walked quickly in the direction of their bedroom.

Tim heard the door close firmly. He looked down at Joe. "You might have said something."

Joe yawned.

In the pantry Tim found two bowls and put the pansies in them. He carried them back into the living-room, but all available space was filled with arrangements that looked as naked, he thought, as a lilac bush in winter. He went into the study and came out again, his hands still full. It was little short of miraculous how many shallow bowls a determined woman could fill with sticks and twigs. He went down the hall and tapped gently on the nursery door with one of the bowls.

Miss Henderson opened the door and whispered, "Thomas is asleep, Mr. McCoy."

"Good," Tim said. "I brought you some flowers."

"Pansies. How lovely. But the nursery is full of Mrs. McCoy's arrangements." She closed the door.

Tim started back down the hall again. Perhaps Cook—no, she claimed that flowers gave her hay fever. He stopped at the bathroom door and got it open.

Vincent, the monkey, was sitting in the wash-basin, his tail wrapped around a tap. He had a tube of toothpaste in his small hands, its possibilities almost exhausted. There was toothpaste on the mirror, toothpaste on the floor, and an attractive pattern of toothpaste on the glass of the shower door.

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"Everybody," Tim said, "is artistic these days." He put down the bowls of pansies and set to work.

When he had finished, he stood in the doorway—Vincent riding on his shoulder—and studied the effect. The Japanese, Tim decided, had nothing on him. There were pansies tastefully arranged in the water glass and in the rack for tooth-brushes; there were pansies on the medicine-chest. The flowers gave the bathroom a gay, festive air.

In the kitchen he heated a bowl of milk, laced it with dark rum, and set it under the stove. Joe sniffed at the brew; his whiskers twinked; his stub tail rose. He looked up at Tim and spoke once, a chirruping sound. Then he lowered his big head and his tongue began its steady beat. Vincent crowded in alongside. To Cook, Tim said, "How many stick-and-bowl arrangements do you have?"

"Three," Cook told him. She didn't turn round.

Philippa was sitting in the bedroom when Tim went in. She lifted her face for his kiss. "I'm sorry," she said. "I was upset."

"Sure," He took off one shoe.

"I worked so hard on each of the arrangements, and Louella thinks they are very good, and then Joe—"

"Sure," Tim said again, and took off his other shoe. He pulled his shirt over his head and got off his trousers, went to his wardrobe and brought out his working-shoes, dungarees, and an old red shirt. He began to put them on.

"You're going to garden," she said.

"Petunias." A note of pride crept into his voice. "Double-ruffled. I picked up a box of seedlings on the way home."

There was silence. A small piece of dried mud dropped off one of Tim's shoes onto the carpet. Philippa looked at it, watched Tim, unseeing, stand on it, grinding it neatly. He said, "Best exercise in the world, gardening."

"Once upon a time," Philippa said, "you played golf."

"Silly game," he said and went out.

In the kitchen, Joe and Vincent had finished their punch, and were engaged in their bath. Tim looked at them and said, "I think you'd better come with me, fellows. Outside."

He got the box of petunias out of the boot of the car and stuck his trowel in his pocket. Joe strolled beside him. Tim said, "It's not a game. You hear?" He got down and dug his first hole. Joe moved up to examine it. Tim turned to the box.

Vincent was squatting beside it. Tim cut a plant loose with great care and then put down the trowel. Vincent picked it up and fled in triumph. "Come back here!" Tim said.

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The monkey kept his distance, still holding the trowel aloft. "All right," Tim said. He turned back to the hole. "Now, look here," he said to Joe.

Joe's judgment of the hole was plain. With the attitude of a man who does his duty by the community, he was raking the dirt back into the hole with his paw. He looked up at Tim and spoke once, accusingly.

Vincent had approached from the rear. He beat the trowel against the box; he raised it aloft, point down, and plunged it into the plants as Tim had done, raised it for another stroke—

From a window Philippa called, "Is the new bathroom décor supposed to be funny?"

It was impossible to look in three directions at once, but Tim tried, and failed. He said slowly, "It was that or the middle of the living-room floor. I grew them, in the face of odds, and I'm proud of them, and—" He was, he realized, talking to himself; Philippa had gone.

He looked around. The trowel had gone too. So had Vincent. So had Joe. So had the hole. He remained there, motionless, for as long as it took to count slowly to ten.

After breakfast, he sat at the table with the newspaper and his third cup of coffee and a cigarette. Cook came in from the kitchen. "Have you done?"

He got up and carried coffee, ashtray, and paper into the study. Philippa said, "Please, Tim, not here. I'm trying to concentrate."

She was standing in front of a large shallow bowl, a leafed branch in her hand. She made a tentative motion with the branch, and then placed it in the centre of the bowl, studied it, and took it out again.

"Marvellous," Tim said.

She set the branch down on the desk. "You don't understand." She paused. "You think it's silly. Well, it isn't. It isn't any sillier than your grubbing around in the dirt and tracking it through the house and tearing up the lawn to plant more flowers than we can use and . . ." She stopped for breath.

"Let's start all over again," Tim said. His tone was gentle.

"Well," Philippa said, "Louella has taught us all she knows. And now—now we're having a competition, all of us; there's even a little piece in the paper about it." She paused. "Anyhow, what I'm trying now is a five-leaf aspidistra."

Tim began to cough.

"Why don't you just laugh out loud?" Philippa said. "Why don't you—" She stamped one foot. "Will you go away?"

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" I hear," Tim said. " I obey." And he walked out into the garden. Joe was sitting in the sun on what was left of the lawn. He appeared to be surveying his domain with a critical eye.

" Hullo," Tim said. He looked around at the garden. It seemed to have changed, altered subtly. The roses didn't look quite so handsome as they had the night before, and it seemed to him, oddly enough, that there were pansies all over the place, enough pansies to fill a dozen houses. He wondered why this had not been evident before. In sudden decision, he walked to the garage and got into his car.

In the locker-room at the Club, Henry, the attendant, said, " It's been a long time, Mr. McCoy."

" I've been too busy for golf," Tim said. He wondered why he had come.

" Course is in good shape," Henry said. " Got some new members, too. Some very nice gentlemen. Colonel Slocombe, now—"

Tim asked, " He's here? "

" Number 93," Henry said.

The colonel was stocky, with close-clipped greying hair. He shook Tim's hand. " Glad to know you."

Tim sat down on the bench. He said, " My wife has taken up Japanese flower-arranging."

" Oh," the colonel said. " My condolences." He sighed. " Women get ideas."

Tim nodded slowly, solemnly.

" Louella," the colonel said and then stopped. He took off his shirt and sat with it in his hands, looking at it. " Where we were, there wasn't much for her to do. She studied this flower-arranging."

He looked at Tim. " I don't know how much she knows about it, but we had sticks stuck in bowls all over the house." He paused.

Tim opened his mouth, then shut it.

" Anyway," the colonel said, " I suppose it's no sillier than some of the things we do." He paused. " Once—this was a long time ago—I grew vegetables. They weren't very good vegetables, and I finally worked out they were costing me an awful lot of money—all but the radishes, that is."

He was silent for a moment or two, looking into the past. " I went what you might call radish-mad. I grew them all over the place, more than we and the neighbours *and* the n.c.o.s' mess could eat. Even the rabbits—and there were a lot of rabbits round there—laid off after a while."

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Tim allowed this to drift through his mind, and then he said slowly, " I knew a fellow once who grew pansies." He stood up. " His name was McCoy." He looked down at the colonel. " My handicap is—was ten. If you don't happen to have a game arranged—"

" I'll see you on the tee," the colonel said . . .

It was late afternoon when Tim got home—feeling, he decided, better than he had felt for some time. Philippa's car was gone. He put his own in the garage and strolled towards the house, past the garden.

Looking back on the gardening craze now, it was hard to remember just how it had begun. Sooner or later, he decided, you saw your excesses reflected in someone else—as he had been brought to see his in Philippa's current enthusiasm. And that too, of course, would pass, in time.

He had come to the back door and he said, " Hullo, you."

Joe was bunched up, chin on forepaws, eyes narrowed and unblinking; his expression was without contentment. Vincent stood up. He spread his arms and declaimed in his high, squeaky voice, detailing his grievances. And then he sat down, clasped his knees with his hands, and wrapped his tail around himself like a cloak. They both watched Tim.

" Still in exile? " Tim opened the door. " We'll all have a drink." He took pleasure in the sudden rise and lift of Joe's stub tail, in the expression of bright interest in Vincent's eyes.

Cook was not there; the loneliness of the kitchen was a joy. Tim heated milk, laced it heavily with dark rum, and set the bowl under the stove. " Have at it, fellows."

Their tongues beat steadily. Tim went into the pantry and poured out a whisky for himself, carried it into the living-room, and sat down. He was still there when the telephone rang.

Philippa said, " Has he come yet? " In the background there was the confused sound of women's voices.

" Who? "

" The man for the aspidistra arrangement." And her voice rose a trifle. " We're about to leave for the judging, and he was supposed to pick it up, and—oh Tim, hasn't he? "

" Just a minute," Tim said. " I'll go and see."

As he reached the study door, he remembered—and he almost jumped into the room.

Joe was on the floor beside the desk, crouched, his rump high. Tim stared at him, then looked at Vincent who sat quietly in a chair, saying nothing. But the large shallow bowl stood on the desk, and the aspidistra rose from it in all its leafed glory, showing

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no signs of wear or tear. Tim let his breath out in a long, relieved sigh.

He was reaching for the telephone when the doorbell rang, and he glanced quickly out of the window and saw a strange van in the drive.

"Your man's here now," he said into the telephone. "I think. Hang on." He picked up the bowl as if it were a jewel of price and headed for the door.

To the van-man he said, "You know how to carry this? It's —it's important."

"Yeah," the man said wearily. "I know. I've already got nine of them." He put a white card in the bowl. It read: *Mrs. McCoy.*

He took the bowl from Tim's hands, looked at it for a moment, and then looked at Tim. He shook his head and turned away.

Tim went back to the telephone. "He's just left. He took it with him. You can relax."

"Was it—I mean, did it look all right, Tim?"

"It looked fine."

There was a pause. "You aren't just teasing, Tim? You really think so?"

"Cross my heart," he said. And then, because this was the time and there would never be another one so good, he added, "I'm sorry I teased you before. I was just—" He couldn't say his pride had been hurt—pride in pansies. How ridiculous could a man be?

"It doesn't matter," Philippa said. Her voice was gentle, grateful.

"I—I played golf this afternoon."

"Did you? I'm glad." And then her voice began to change again, the apprehension returning. "I shan't be long, an hour maybe. The judging, all those people watching— Oh, I wish I were home now, Tim."

"So do I." He hesitated, but she said nothing. "Good luck," he said.

"Thank you, Tim." Her voice sounded as if she meant it.

Tim hung up slowly. He saw then that Vincent was still in the chair, still motionless. Joe's rump and stub tail protruded from beneath the desk. There was a rustling sound, a scraping of claws on the bare floor.

"What've you got?" Tim said. "A mouse?"

Joe backed slowly out from under the desk. He chirruped. He made a sudden stab with one curled forepaw. Something came out from under the desk, something long and raggedly leafed—a mutilated aspidistra branch. Joe flung it into the air,

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sprang after it, turning, twisting, striking rapidly, right paw, left paw, spinning it this way and that before it touched the floor.

Tim said, "Oh no!" thinking of the way the van-man had looked, had appeared to be on the point of saying something—the man who had already collected nine arrangements and had seen what they should be like.

And he, Tim, had been enjoying his drink; there had been ample time for Joe to pluck out a branch, perhaps knock the others askew. Maybe a small breath of air had stirred the leaves, making them appear alive, a challenge . . .

Joe crouched, his big head lowered, his chin almost touching the floor. He wiggled his rear. He charged, caught the branch as he passed, carried it with him in his rush, flung it high into the air, and then leapt up after it.

Vincent jumped up and down in his chair, applauding wildly.

Tim grabbed the telephone book, searched through its pages, and dialled. He listened dully to the ringing in the empty Slocombe house. They had been just on the point of leaving, Philippa had said. Going where?

Tim sat down. He picked up his whisky glass, took one long swallow, set it down empty. Joe picked up the branch in his hooked paw, sniffed at it, dropped it. It lay still.

He looked at Tim. Tim nodded. "It's dead," he said, wishing for the moment that the same might be said of him.

He sat there, motionless. Vincent got down from his chair, crept across the carpet, climbed up Tim's leg and on up to his shoulder, where he wrapped one small arm and his tail around Tim's neck. He squeaked softly, consolingly.

Joe yawned. He lifted his forepaw and regarded it pridefully, working the hooked claws in and out.

Tim pulled one of Vincent's legs gently, and reached down to scratch the big muscles of Joe's shoulders. "I'm afraid, fellows, that there's going to be the devil to pay."

They watched him in silence. "I think another drink would be a sound idea—for all of us."

They sat, the three of them, in the study, Tim's empty whisky glass at his elbow, the empty milk-and-rum bowl on the floor. The mutilated aspidistra branch lay in the centre of the rug.

They heard the car drive in, the garage door close, the slow footsteps coming through the house. Vincent whimpered and ran to hide under the desk. Only his head—bright eyes beneath a black skull-cap—protruded. Joe sat where he was in stolid patience.

Tim called, "Hullo, dear."

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Philippa walked into the room. She carried a bag, which she laid on the desk. Slowly she began to remove one glove. Then she saw the branch on the rug.

"So there it is," she said. She looked at Tim. Vincent ducked behind the desk. Joe watched, warily.

Tim said, "I didn't find it until I'd hung up. The man was gone. I tried to phone you, but there wasn't any answer." It was not defence, not even a listing of extenuating circumstances. "I let the boys in and I didn't keep an eye on them." He was silent for a moment or two. "I'm sorry. I meant what I said on the telephone. I—" He stopped.

In the silence, Vincent peeked out. He rolled his eyes up towards Philippa's face. And then, strangely, unaccountably, he came all the way out, slowly, fearfully, crept across the floor to Joe's side, and sat there, huddled close.

Philippa stood there, looking straight at Tim. "I spent five hours on that arrangement."

"I know," Tim said. "I'm sorry. Joe's sorry." He looked at Joe. Joe's expression was not even vaguely apologetic.

Philippa put her hand in her purse. She took out a small piece of something, something blue. She held it up for them all to see. "Five hours," she said. "And Joe probably spent five seconds on the rearrangement." She paused. "We won first prize. Louella said that she had never seen such grace, such originality, such—"

She stopped. She was blinking hard, but still the tears came. "How silly can you be, Tim? How ridiculous can you make yourself, fooling with stuff you don't know anything about, taking it seriously, and then finding that other people don't know any more about it than you do, or less?"

"I don't know," Tim said. He just sat there, unable to identify his feelings; they were confused, but he was smiling, and that, really, was all that mattered. And Philippa was beginning to smile, too.

"I asked myself those same questions," Tim said, "just this morning, and again this afternoon, after I'd played golf."

"Did you?"

He nodded. He stood up. "I'll get you a drink."

"Wait." Philippa took her hat off and tossed it on the desk. "I think for all hands—for us, and for the boys too."

She bent down and picked up the mutilated branch, worked with it, and then held it out, the blue ribbon fluttering from the stem. "Here, Joe. It's yours. You won first prize."

She dropped the branch, straightened, took Tim's arm, and pressed it tight. "Do you think I could learn to play golf?"

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"I know you could," Tim said. Everything was all right; he and Philippa were together again and that was all that mattered. "With your determination—" He stopped and they smiled at each other.

Philippa said, "Look." Joe was sniffing at the ribbon, at the branch. He looked up. He spoke once, gravely.

"You're right," Tim said, "absolutely right. It's dead as can be. The ribbon just proves it." He took hold of Philippa's arm and they started towards the door.

Joe hurried round them, walked on ahead, stub tail high, pacing with solid dignity. And then Vincent went running to the head of the procession. He had the branch in one hand. He beat time in the manner of a drum major with a baton. The blue ribbon fluttered.

"There are times," Philippa said, "when I think—when I'm sure that Joe is smarter than we are."

Tim nodded gravely.

★ ★ ★

PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 25

Argosy's twenty-fifth Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first five correct solutions checked on the closing date. If you do not wish to cut Argosy, copy your solution on to a plain sheet of paper, adding your name and address in capital letters. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 25), 3 Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp), to arrive by Thursday, June 9th, the closing date. We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final. Names of the prize-winners and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale August 10th.

★

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STRIKING THE BALANCE

"I've got to know which court it's in first," said Tommy

by HENRY CECIL

JUSTICE in England may be slow and expensive, it may even make mistakes, but it is pure.

Or so everyone has always thought. But their ideas were rudely shaken by the case of Tommy Newcastle. Very rudely shaken indeed.

Tommy had been a solicitor's clerk in an office which specialized in criminal work. Unfortunately, there was some disagreement between Tommy and his employers about some cash which disappeared, and Tommy found himself without a job.

Not long afterwards, he wandered down to one of his regular haunts, the Old Bailey. He listened to a case or two and then came out into the lobby for some air. On one of the seats he saw a woman, sitting crying. Tommy was a sympathetic person, he walked over to ask what was the matter. Not that he had to be told. Obviously, her husband or boy-friend or someone of whom she was fond had gone inside, or was on the way there.

He was quite right. A case of receiving. Tommy asked her to tell him all about it. She told him and added, at the end, that what made it so awful was that he'd four previous convictions for the same thing. He'd get a stretch this time, and no mistake. And there was another baby on the way. What was she to do? He was a good husband—when he was at home—which, through no wish of his, had not been very often in the last twelve years.

Tommy considered the matter. "How much did he get for the stuff?" he asked. "I mean," he added hastily, "how much did they say he got for it?"

"Two hundred pounds—for what they traced."

"Humph," said Tommy. "And how much was the stuff they didn't trace worth?"

"I wouldn't rightly know," said the woman, "but what difference would it make if I did?"

"Not much, really," said Tommy. "I was just interested. Now, look," he added, after a moment or two's thought, "don't you say anything to anyone, but I may be able to help. Which court is he being tried in?" The woman told him.

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"Old Turnip-Top," said Tommy. "I see." He paused again. Then: "You know," he went on, "a bit of help from a judge in his summing-up, or one juryman on your side, can make a heap of difference."

"What do you mean?" said the woman. She also believed in the incorruptibility of justice. That was one of her troubles.

"I've known cases," said Tommy, "where, at the start, it was eleven to one on the jury for guilty or not guilty, and the one has persuaded the other eleven to change their minds. Of course, when you get on a jury two strong-minded people who don't see eye to eye, there's a disagreement. But that doesn't often happen. Usually there's not more than one, and the jury vote the way he thinks. Of course, sometimes there isn't one, and then anything may happen—unless you can *make* one of them strong-minded. And as for a judge's summing-up—well, if you've been here before, I don't have to tell you about that."

"But what can you do?" asked the woman.

"Never you mind," said Tommy. "And don't you say a word to your husband about it—not till afterwards, anyway. You just let the trial take its course. You're sure he's in old Turnip-Top's court? I'd better make certain."

He went and looked at the list. "Yes, that's right enough," he said, "as long as there's not a transfer. Now I'm going off. Remember, not a word to a soul. Give me your address, and I'll come to tea the day after tomorrow—with you *both*."

"I don't know how to thank you," said the woman.

"Don't try," said Tommy, "till the day after tomorrow."

The day after tomorrow came, and the tea-party took place. Mr. Wilkins, the receiver, could hardly believe his ears when the jury said, "Not guilty," and the judge said, "You're discharged." But he didn't waste any time in the dock wondering, in case the jury changed their minds. He and his wife were back home as soon as they could get there. And they gave Tommy the tea of his life. Whisky and gin mostly. And £25.

"Sure you can afford it?" said Tommy.

"We can't ever thank you enough," said the woman, who was fond of her husband and liked him about the place.

"Make it £30, Alf," she added, and they did.

It was not long after this that Alf recommended Tommy to a friend who was in a similar line of business and had also got into difficulties. Tommy promised to see him. They met at Marble Arch—the friend was on bail—and Tommy heard all about it in the Park. He asked him a few questions about the case, and then said, "Where are you coming up?"

"Sessions."

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"Sessions, eh? That's not so easy. But I'll think about it."

He thought for a minute. His companion became anxious.

"It's worth £50 to you," he said.

"Now, look," said Tommy, "don't get me wrong. I like helping people out, but I don't ask anything for it. If you like to give me a present afterwards, that's up to you."

"Make it £75," said the man.

"I don't know that it can be done at all," said Tommy.

"Eighty pounds."

"That's not it," said Tommy. "I've got to know which court it's in first."

"A hundred pounds," urged his companion.

"I'll meet you there," said Tommy, "before you surrender, and then I'll tell you if it can be done. If it's in Long John Silver's court, I doubt if I can do a thing. But let's hope it isn't."

It wasn't, and just before he surrendered to his bail, the prisoner was delighted to receive a confident wink and nod from Tommy. All the same, he didn't feel at all good in the dock, with warders behind and a judge in front, and everything very formal and precise, and the cells downstairs. But three hours later he could have kissed Tommy. He was free.

He gave Tommy £125, he was so pleased. And, he thought, there may always be another time. Just as well to treat him handsome.

It was not long before Tommy's fame began to spread in the underworld. It was a new idea and it seemed to work. And they liked a man who never wanted anything in advance. Of course, he was bilked occasionally, but not often. A mixture of genuine gratitude and the possibility of help being wanted in the future kept the takings side well up. But he didn't accept every case.

"Sorry, old man," he'd say, "but I got to be careful. Just daren't. Anyway, if I tried it, it's hopeless in that court."

Most particular Tommy was about the court where his client was being tried. He had to know the number of the court and the name of the judge. Even then, occasionally things went wrong, and his client was convicted. But this was rare, and when it happened, Tommy did not become too unpopular with the party concerned. After all, he'd had nothing from him.

But, of course, fame such as Tommy's can't go on for long without coming to the ears of the police. At first they took no notice of it. Who'd ever heard of anyone dropping a judge a five-pound note? Or a juryman, either?

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But when Inspector Branch lost his case, things began to happen. Inspector Branch was not a very clever man, but he was as straight as a die. He'd worked his way up in the force from a constable to Chief Inspector. He was not bright, but he knew where his duty was and he did it. At long last he had brought an old quarry of his to trial. Benny Bones he was known as.

The Inspector had been after him for a long time, but he'd always slipped through his fingers somehow. Now, at last, he'd got him. In the Inspector's view, it was an open-and-shut case. Before it came on, he even paid a friendly visit to Benny in the cells. He felt almost sorry for him.

"Cheer up, old boy," he said, "you've had a good run."

"Still running," said Benny, and winked at him.

The Inspector thought nothing of the wink until, at lunch-time, he happened to notice Tommy coming away from the judges' entrance to the Old Bailey. He didn't think much about it then, but he'd heard of Tommy and he just wondered. Not very much, though. It was an open-and-shut case—at least, so he thought.

But when Mr. Justice Bream began to sum up, he started to feel an emptiness inside him; and, as the judge went on, the Inspector's face actually grew pale. And when the judge ended, he felt like jumping into the Thames. Although the Inspector was not brilliant, he did know the difference between a summing-up for a conviction and a summing-up for an acquittal.

The former ends something like this, with emphasis placed on the appropriate words: "Of course, if you still have any reasonable doubt in your minds, members of the jury, you will acquit the prisoner, but if you are quite satisfied as to his guilt, you will not let any motives of sympathy, either with him or his family, come between you and your duty."

The latter ends something like this: "Of course, if you are satisfied of the prisoner's guilt you will say so, but if, having regard to all the circumstances, you feel some doubt about the matter, then it is the prisoner's right that you should say *Not Guilty*."

And that is what the judge said in Benny Bones's case, and the jury, without leaving the box, acquitted him. As he left the dock, Benny gave the Inspector another wink.

But the Inspector was not taking his defeat lying down. He requested an interview with an Assistant Commissioner of Police, and placed the facts before him.

"You're not suggesting, Inspector, that Mr. Justice Bream was bribed?" said the Assistant Commissioner bluntly.

"I'm not suggesting anything, sir," said the Inspector. "But

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you've heard of Tommy Newcastle and so have I. And I have told you what I saw and heard myself. It seemed to me to be my duty to tell you."

The Assistant Commissioner decided to have Tommy Newcastle watched, and he was genuinely surprised at the result. He was not surprised that Tommy was regularly seen hanging about the places where jurymen are to be found, because they go in like the public, except when they retire to consider their verdict. But he was surprised to find that Tommy would be seen not only outside the judges' entrance, but occasionally outside a judge's house and, on several of these occasions, he appeared to be fingering five-pound notes. It can't be true, he said to himself, but he spoke to the Commissioner about it.

In consequence of their discussion, Mr. Justice Cramp, going one day to the Old Bailey from South Kensington, was surprised to find that, whenever he happened to look round, a man seemed to be following him. The judge liked exercise, and walked all the way.

When he found the man still behind him near Blackfriars Bridge, he stopped. So did the man. The judge called a uniformed police officer, said who he was, and together they approached the man.

"This gentleman says you've been following him," said the constable.

The man looked embarrassed, but said nothing.

"Are you deaf?" said the constable. "Have you been following this gentleman?"

"Can I have a word with you, mate?" said the man.

The constable had not had the privilege of protecting a judge before. He might give evidence before him one day, and judges had a knack of remembering people. So he'd show what he could do. "There's nothing you need be afraid to say in the presence of this gentleman," he said, and as the man still said nothing, he went on more loudly: "Now, answer me. You've got a tongue in your head, haven't you? Have you been following him or not?"

"Yes—I have," said the man eventually.

"And might I know the reason?" asked the judge.

"Yes, and make it snappy," said the constable.

"I'm a police officer," said the man, not very happily.

"What!" said the judge.

"Oh, you are, are you?" said the constable. "Let's see your warrant card."

The man produced it.

"Oh!" said the constable. Nothing he had so far read or

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learnt provided for such a situation. He said nothing and waited for the judge to speak.

"And why are you following me, officer?" he asked.

"Orders, sir," said the man.

"From whom?"

"Superintendent Dean, sir."

"I see," said the judge. "I don't know what it's all about, but you'd better go on following me, I suppose. Thank you very much, constable."

Mr. Justice Cramp was not the only judge to be followed. And when the Lord Chief Justice heard of it, he was furious. He went to see the Home Secretary. The Home Secretary sent for the Commissioner, and everyone felt extremely embarrassed. You can't ask a judge if he's been offered a bribe. But there was Tommy fingering his notes, and there were the prisoners getting off more often than not. However, Tommy was never seen to speak to a juryman or a judge, so they couldn't touch him.

It was most worrying. Indeed, one judge gave the jury a searching look and asked them if any of them had spoken about the case to anyone, and threatened them with every kind of penalty if they did. The jury did nothing, except acquit the prisoner, as they didn't like the way the judge had spoken to them. Tommy Newcastle had nothing to do with that particular case, but the prisoner thought he had, and was most grateful, showing his gratitude in the usual way.

Tommy was now becoming quite affluent, and he started to turn away business more often. One evening, he was sitting in his flat, reading the paper and sampling a glass of port, when two men called to see him.

"You Tommy Newcastle?"

"I am."

"Good. We've got a job for you."

"Oh?"

"Yes. You've read about it, I expect—Jimmy Bellows."

"Oh, that's murder," said Tommy. "I don't touch murder."

"You touch this one," said one of the men.

"Oh no, I don't," said Tommy.

"Now, look," said the second man, "we came here quite friendly, and it'll be worth two-fifty quid for you when you've fixed it."

"Sorry," said Tommy, "can't be done."

"You let me finish," said the second man. "It's two-fifty for you when you've fixed it—but if you don't, there'll be two murders instead of one. See? And it won't be an easy way out,

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either. Ever seen anyone beaten up with one of these?" And he brought out an ugly-looking knuckleduster from his pocket.

"Be reasonable," said Tommy. He was pleading now. "I can't do it, I tell you."

"Well, you know what'll happen if you don't. Shan't warn you again. See you after the verdict—one way or another."

The two men left, and Tommy, really frightened, went to the nearest police-station. He asked for police protection, but found it rather embarrassing to explain why.

"Threatened to beat you up and kill you? But why?"

Tommy paused. He knew the men meant what they said. He knew the type. So he had rushed round to the police-station without first thinking what he was going to tell them.

"Look," said the Inspector who interviewed him, "you help us, and we'll help you. That's fair enough, isn't it?"

"What d'you want?" said Tommy.

"You're a good bit in the news today, aren't you?" said the Inspector. "If you'll tell us how you do it and who else is in it, we'll give you a guard night and day."

"Do what?" said Tommy, playing for time.

"You know well enough," said the Inspector. "And I was about to add vice versa."

"What are you getting at?"

"Quite simple. If you don't tell us, all we'll do is to catch the merchants who murder you—after they've done it."

"But you can't just leave a man to be butchered," said Tommy, getting really alarmed.

"How do we know that it's not just a cock-and-bull story?"

"But I swear it's true."

"So you do. But why should I believe you? A lot of people swear things, you know. And even if all you say is true, it may have been just bluff."

"But it wasn't. I know it wasn't."

"We hear that every day, old man. But I might believe you if you came clean—really clean, I mean. Anyway, it's up to you."

As Tommy said nothing, the Inspector got up and yawned. "Well," he said, "sorry we can't do anything for you. We're short of men—perhaps you've read about it."

"All right," said Tommy, "I'll tell you. But you'll promise to look after me?"

"We'll look after you," said the Inspector. "As a matter of fact, I think you're important enough to come to Scotland Yard. Safe enough there. We'll take you in the morning."

The next day, Tommy had the honour of an interview with

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five highly-placed officials at Scotland Yard. He told them of the threats that had been made, and what he'd been asked to do.

"Yes," said the Assistant Commissioner, "we'll go into that in a moment. First of all, you tell us how you've been operating."

"I'll tell you in confidence," said Tommy.

"There's no such thing as confidence in crime, and I warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence if you're charged hereafter."

"Oh well," said Tommy, "there's nothing for it. But you'll give me protection?"

"If you satisfy us that you've told us the truth, we will."

"Well—what d'you want to know?" said Tommy.

"You know quite well what we want to know. What have you been doing in all these cases?"

"Well—nothing wrong," said Tommy, "and, to tell you the truth, nothing at all."

The Assistant Commissioner got up. "All right," he said, "you look after yourself."

"But I swear I've been doing nothing. I only took on cases where I thought there was a good chance of the man being acquitted. And usually I was right. But, of course, I had to pretend I was doing something, you see. You don't really think I'd try to bribe a judge! I used the notes to make people think I had. And as for old Branch—well, you must know he's not too strong on top. He'd a very dicky case against Benny. You do believe me, don't you?"

But they didn't, not then, nor for some time after he was beaten up. Jimmy Bellows's friends left Tommy alive by mistake and then at last, a slow piecing together of all the evidence showed that he had told them the truth after all, and that all he'd done had been, as he'd said, nothing.

But the Bellows case had finished him. He felt sure the man would be convicted. If he took it on, they'd think he'd double-crossed them. If he didn't take it on, it was just as bad. There was no way out.

The whole story was eventually published in the press, and British justice was triumphantly vindicated. But the case of Tommy Newcastle had been painful for the public while it lasted, and it remained painful for him for some time afterwards.

★ ★ ★

Everybody deserves a glance, but not everybody deserves an answer.

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

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THE OTHER ENEMY

"But," he cried in horror
"you said there were no monsters"

by ROBERT WOLF EMMETT

THE fat little spaceship cruised deeper into the newly found solar system—a neat, ordinary system with a healthy sun lighting a cluster of nine well-behaved planets and their satellites.

Everyone on the ship, from venerable Navigator to little Foodserver, stayed as close as possible to the viewing-screens. Huge round eyes with lavender pupils stared from grey, furry faces. Voices like tiny glass flutes echoed comments and speculations along the gaily painted metal corridors.

The third planet was beginning to take shape on the screens. So far, the system had been a great disappointment to the explorers looking for intelligent life.

The huge outer planets, far from the busy but smallish sun, had proved to have monstrously thick shells of ammoniated ice and atmospheres of methane fatal to oxygen-breathing creatures like the people of the Six Worlds.

The fourth planet had seemed promising, but turned out to be a sear ball of red rock, motionless dust, and feeble ground lichens. But the third planet, now swimming into view, was like a vision of home.

A shining sphere of blue and green, slightly flattened at the poles, which were capped with gleaming ice, it hung in dark space like a tastefully designed jewel.

"Surely there must be life here," said Navigator admiringly. "What a waste if there is not."

The others of the small crew twitched their long furry tails in agreement, never taking their eyes from the viewing-screens where one could now make out veils of white cloud, shot all through with gold, surrounding the third planet.

"Will they be like us?" squeaked Foodserver, stroking his fur which still had the iridescence of childhood. "Or will they be horrible monsters?"

"The Star-Maker," said Navigator sternly, "fits the form to the place. There are no such things as monsters."

The little one did not seem crushed. He bustled over to a viewer and twiddled the calibrated knobs with his seven jointless

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fingers, the claws, which would be soon falling off, getting in his way.

Watching him, Navigator reflected with affectionate exasperation that the tremendous excitements of deep-space travel were not good for the very young. The imagination got too much jolting. The simple duties of opening and serving the canned foods and helping crochety old Grower with the hydroponics tanks were not enough to keep the little fellow occupied.

At the forward viewer stood Historian, muttering into her wrist recording-machine. Beside her, Picture-Keeper wiggled his long ears at regular intervals. This was to operate his camera, an invention of his own that consisted of a pair of thick spectacles astride his flat, furry nose. It took a stereoscopic picture of whatever his eyes saw. Though the gadget was eminently practical, he was getting fed up with jokes about his ear-wiggling.

His images and Historian's notes covered everything encountered by the roving ship, so that the people at home on the Six Worlds might marvel at the endless variety of the Star-Maker's creation.

As the plump little ship neared the outer film of the third planet's rich atmosphere, Power-Drive-Engineer slowed to a crawl. Navigator spoke to Historian about finding a place to explore, preferably near some centre of civilization—if, by grace of the Star-Maker, their long search was to be rewarded at last.

Historian's delicate hands manipulated the electronic binoculars and she pressed her face into the soft-rimmed eyepiece. For a time she scanned the place below—they were close enough now for there to be a " below " and an " up." Then those near her saw the slender body stiffen, the tail start to swing back and forth, and—ultimate sign of agitation—the silky fur ripple as though in a breeze.

The piping voices hushed. Everyone waited patiently to learn what had so horrified the dispassionate Historian. Everyone, that is, but Foodserver who was never patient about anything.

" What is it? " he shrilled. " What do you see? "

There was no answer from the absorbed figure at the scope. Foodserver danced up and down in frustrated curiosity.

Historian, her voice oddly taut, summoned Navigator. He set the ship on robot control and loped over to her. Silently she motioned him to look into the binoculars. He looked and his breath came out in a gasp. He and Historian stared at each other, hardly breathing.

Foodserver could not stand it another minute. Ship's discipline or no ship's discipline, he hopped to the scope, stretched up, and peered into the lenses. " Oh! " he squeaked. " Oh! "

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One by one, all in silence or with soft murmurs, the explorers looked at the close-up image of the beautiful third planet.

Before they left home, the Council had said to them, " Go out there into the great darkness and find some other intelligent life, so that we may not feel ourselves alone."

Well, they had found intelligent life. Stupendous intelligence —and all snuffed out. There were cities in the viewer but they were in ruins, smashed, ripped, and blasted, like elaborate toys crushed by a fretful child. The plan had been, if life were met, to land near a city and project from the ship a huge image of one of themselves holding in one hand a drawing of a bisected angle, in the other a piece of soil-grown fruit.

The crew member in charge of the projection machine waited in vain for his order.

The ship floated closer, circling the planet. City after city showed, scattered and lifeless. Towers lay stretched on the ground like rusting skeletons, bridges hung in mid air like broken jaws, and everywhere were deep craters with glassy white edges like terrible sores.

" A meteor storm, perhaps," said Picture-Keeper, but there was no conviction in his voice.

In the countryside the trees were black and bare or, even worse, were covered with rank foliage that looked so wrong it had to be some sort of forced mutation. This grew up out of a carpet of green fungus that was turning dirty-white here and there.

" The fungus," explained Grower, " is dying. But it seems to have eaten off the living matter that preceded—that stuff." He pointed with disgust at the flabby, bloated mutations.

" But how did all this happen? " asked Foodserver, subdued for the first time in his life.

No one answered him. He was much too young to be exposed to this obscenity. For there could be no doubt that this was— worst of all possible blasphemies—deliberate destruction. Feeling ill, Picture-Keeper twitched his ears to operate the camera; otherwise the people of the Six Worlds would never believe it.

In sadness they took the ship back to the first great city, one of the largest on the whole planet. Its heart was a slim, small island, thickly clustered with a profusion of elegant metal towers, now bent grotesquely and rusting to red lace. The counters picked up no excessive radio-activity; the air was pure, although higher in oxygen than they were used to.

A soft spring rain fell on the wreckage and the dying green fungus that clung wherever there was exposed soil. Two rivers flowed, clean and sparkling, to the sea.

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" I wonder," said Foodserver, who seemed to have grown up a little, " what they looked like."

" Yes," said Historian, " that is important."

Following their usual exploration procedure, they got into their round, air-skimming sledges and cruised among the silent ruins. The magnetic pick-ups gleaned samples of artefacts, sprayed them with a transparent coating, and stored them in bins for Historian. " Especially things with writing on them," she requested, " and works of art."

But there were no works of art. And only a few bits of writing. The explosions and the solar heat they generated had melted stone and vaporized whole blocks of metal-framed buildings. In one street lay a pointed shape that was obviously a water-travelling ship, tossed up from the sea.

They carefully kept a twist of glazed blue-and-white metal bearing the mysterious inscription, KEEP RIGHT, and a slab of massive reddish metal deeply inscribed, GRAND CENTRAL.

The explorers felt lonely in the desolation. Historian put her arm round Foodserver's shoulders.

" What did they look like, you asked? Well, from the doors we have been able to make out and the stairs and seats of stone, we can know that they were something like us physically. They were about twice as tall, though, and much more heavily built. They stood erect, bent their bodies at the hips and knees, as we do, and had articulated hands."

" Did they have tails? " asked Foodserver, curling his own around his neck and tickling his right ear with the furry tip.

" That we may never know," said Historian disconsolately. " If only a picture had survived, even showing just one of them."

It was Foodserver who found the great door. Skimming over the bare hills just above the city, he suddenly shrilled into the phones, " What is that? "

It turned out to be a huge metal door let into the raw rock of a small mountain. Hardly visible under the coating of dying fungus, it was at least ten times the height of the tallest person on the ship.

Hope spurred the explorers; perhaps here was an underground refuge of the survivors of whatever had happened to the third planet. They assembled before the mighty door, again marvelling at the engineering genius of the great lost people. They made as much noise as they could. There was no answer from within. Perhaps, suggested Navigator, they were being too noisy and scaring anyone inside.

Foodserver volunteered to try it alone. With a mingled feeling of heady self-importance and strange humility, he went to knock

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at the door. His soft rapping seemed the only sound on the whole planet. There was no answer. He shouted as loud as he could: the delicate notes echoed from the blank metal. After a while they took atomic torches to the tough metal, even though Power-Drive-Engineer grumbled about the drain on his engines. He had some justification: it took hours to get through.

When at last a section fell away, its crash muffled by the carpet of horrid mould, there was nothing behind it but an empty cave. Foodserver yelped in disappointment.

Historian shook her head. "That colossal door was never put up just to keep the rain out of a rock cave," she said firmly.

They went in and poked about, stripping the mould from the walls. Inside, the ugly growth was even closer to death than outside. Grower found the inner door. Smaller than the other one, it was of the same tough metal and its edges were sealed with lead. When that barrier was breached, everyone sighed.

Ahead stretched a vast natural chamber of rock, wholly free of the green mould. Piled high were crates and boxes, sealed in lead foil and labelled in large black letters. One inscription was common to all, METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART—whatever that might mean.

Navigator held Foodserver back with a firm hand on the ruff of fur at the back of his neck. He gave a ceremonious nod to Historian. With the slow dignity so admired by her race, but a little flustered none the less, she advanced to the packages, chose a small one, and set to work with her knife. Working carefully, she exposed a case made of slats of wood, then a flat object wrapped in more foil, then in heavy cloth. When this was removed, it was as though a rocket had gone off in the grey room.

Light blazed up at them, colour as pure as sky and flowers, and they knew at last what the people of the third planet had looked like. The object that the lost people had stored away with such loving determination was a square of stout cloth stretched tight over a wooden frame and touched with countless strokes of pigment in many colours.

The picture thus formed represented a female—they knew that at once—holding a baby in her lap. She had only five rather stiffly jointed fingers and her eyes were quite small, but most wonderfully gentle. She wore a white garment caught at the waist with a blue belt and a simple blue cloak. For some reason, probably symbolic, the artist had shown a glowing light around her head, but the real radiance was in her smile as she looked down at the baby.

"No tails," said Foodserver, but nobody heard him.

They stood in silence before the picture. The longer you

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looked the more you saw. The baby's face—his head, too, was surrounded with the golden corona—was strangely wise. And in the mother's gaze there seemed to be, beneath the delicate wonder and joy, some dark prophecy of dread.

" How very much they were like us," somebody breathed. And all at once the whole universe seemed less strange and its pattern more marvellous. The painting was sprayed with the preserving coating and stacked in a sledge while Historian carefully noted down the label that meant nothing to anyone any more—11030974-IR16 MADONNA AND CHILD, *by Raphael.*

Gently the other boxes were opened, even Foodserver being allowed to open ones of his own choosing. He worked quietly, as did they all. They became sadder and sadder. The vast rock chamber seemed to grow warm with the colours released from the packages. That the lost people had been giants of form and mighty engineers they already knew, but here was their inner and veritable look; the way they were—seen in the way they saw things.

They had owned a planet abundantly rich in every variety of leaf and creature, and they had loved their planet down to the least blade of grass. Nothing was too small or too trivial for them to recall, nothing too grand for them to make an upreaching try at stating it. Historian knew that the hidden pictures represented many different ages in racial development, but in all there shone the same one spirit—potent, dreamy, inquiring, reverent.

Foodserver came hopping over with a very small picture that caused great wonder. It was painted in pale colours on some sort of glazed material; it showed a building like a bubble of foam standing in a garden. There was no telling what it had been from the label, TAJ MAHAL, *anonymous miniature*, but they all knew that the building stood like that no longer.

" What poets they were! " said Engineer.

" What mathematicians! " said Navigator.

" But what," said Foodserver—and the question fell like ice in the great cave—" did the *others* look like? "

Everyone stood quite still for a moment. A dark shadow seemed to gather round them. Here, on the picture cloths, were the great people. Not, perhaps, the faces of one's own familiar standards of beauty, but unquestionably a noble race and comprehending. So, then, who had done all that to the cities and the very grass?

They looked around fearfully. Each had his own image of the kind of creature that had so ruthlessly wiped out the busy dreamers of the third planet.

" But you said there were no monsters! " cried Foodserver.

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"Perhaps I was wrong," murmured Navigator. "I don't know."

At once Navigator took hold and exercised command. They must hurry the packing and get away. It was just possible that the terrible invaders were still lurking somewhere near. When they left this system they must be certain they were not being followed. If followed—and his delicate voice was grim—they must not go home. There were no weapons on the ship, but it could blow up its own engines if need be. At all costs they must never lead that dreadful enemy back to the Six Worlds.

Everyone understood and a courtliness came into their manner with each other. The remaining pictures, still in their wrappings, were hastily piled on the sledges.

Foodserver stood in a corner, pondering. "Isn't it possible," he asked at last, "that the great ones might have done it themselves?"

Several of the crew looked at the youngster in amazement. Such a bad tongue, really! Navigator took him firmly by the ruff and led him to a foil-covered picture. "Now, young fellow, you unwrap that yourself and take a good long look," said Navigator. This even though they were in a hurry, because the right thinking of the young is most important. Historian added her bit while Foodserver worked at the package.

"You remember, little one, that all those ships and cars that ran along metal rails were powered by simple, ancient combustion engines. And all that—that *destruction*"—the word was not easy for her to say—"was from atomic weapons. Now, is it logical that a race with atomic energy would use it for weapons and not for power and production?"

Foodserver had to admit that she must be right. He concentrated on seeing what beautiful vision the picture was going to present. But he was not the first to see it, after all. He had to step behind it to loosen the wrappings.

What he saw was the sudden look of sick horror and disbelief on the faces of the others as the painting emerged. He hurried round to the front and looked. His eyes began to burn and he knew that there was no longer any need to fear the dreadful enemy. He had been right, but it gave him no satisfaction.

He felt hurt, cheated; they all did, their round eyes sad and their very limbs twisting in agony with that bleeding figure nailed to a cross.

★ ★ ★

The great pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do.

WALTER BAGEHOT

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JAM SESSION

Come on and hear, come on and hear
Alexander's Ragtime Band

IRVING BERLIN

Oh, silver tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

In a Harlem cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.
A dancing girl whose eyes are bold
Lifts high a dress of silken gold.

Oh, singing tree!
Oh, shining rivers of the soul!

Were Eve's eyes
In the first garden
Just a bit too bold?
Was Cleopatra gorgeous
In a gown of gold?

Oh, shining tree!
Oh, silver rivers of the soul!

In a whirling cabaret
Six long-headed jazzers play.

LANGSTON HUGHES, *Jazzonia*

Borrowed Time

A further delay was caused at this session by the Affair of Benny Carter's Soprano Saxophone. In a tune called *Firebird*, I had written an important and essential part for this instrument; I knew Benny could play it, because he could play almost any instrument with astonishing competence, and he had promised to arrive at the studio with one. Unfortunately, Benny had pawned his soprano saxophone some years before; he had not only long ago lost the ticket, of course, but he had also forgotten the name and whereabouts of the pawnbroker. Thus during the whole period when we were coping with *Donegal Cradle Song* and for nearly an hour afterwards the band's porter was on the telephone trying to track down (*a*) the pawnbroker and, failing that—(*b*) anybody in Harlem who could remember where Benny was likely to have pledged this valuable and indispensable instrument. Eventually Benny Carter's soprano saxophone was found and

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brought to the studio; as the finder had not redeemed it, it was allowed out of the pawnshop only on condition that it was returned immediately after use. This arrangement suited Benny very well; he felt it extremely unlikely that he would ever need a soprano saxophone again once *Firebird* was in the can.

SPIKE HUGHES, *Second Movement*

Discordant Note

You think they are crusaders, sent
From some infernal clime,
To pluck the eyes of Sentiment,
And dock the tail of Rhyme,
To crack the voice of Melody,
And break the legs of Time.

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES

Tiger Rag

Down in New Orleans they remember " Jelly Roll used to play piano all day and practise all night . . . We used to ask him when do he sleep?—he fool at the piano so much."

Down in New Orleans one morning, down in one of those Storyville dance halls, young Morton was fooling around with an old-time quadrille—maybe it happened just this way—he was just playing around with this old tune, sort of half asleep after a hard night, and suddenly he rolled his left forearm across two octaves of keys—a black and white tone cluster. Somebody in there listening, hollered, " Hey, Winding Boy," says, " Hey, that sounds like a tiger hollering."

" Yeah? " says young Morton, deserted son of that fast-living, trombone-playing contractor, Ed La Menthe. " Yeah, I believe it does. Sounds just exactly like a tiger roaring. HOLD THAT TIGER! "

ALAN LOMAX, *Mister Jelly Roll*

Let's Swing It

So, love, let you come dancing
Down the jazzy lanes of spring,
Through the ragtime green of meadows
By the high cliff's muted brink.
Let's swing it by the river
To the torch-song of the water
While yet our sinews answer
The off-beat's hot-licked pause.

VALENTIN IREMONGER, *Spring Stomp*

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Leader of the Band

Darius the Mede was a king and a wonder.
His eye was proud, and his voice was thunder.
He kept bad lions in a monstrous den.
He fed up the lions on Christian men.

Daniel was the chief hired man of the land.
He stirred up the jazz in the palace band.
He whitewashed the cellar. He shovelled in the coal.
And Daniel kept a-praying: " Lord, save my soul."
Daniel kept a-praying: " Lord, save my soul."
Daniel kept a-praying: " Lord, save my soul."

Daniel was the butler, swagger and swell.
He ran upstairs. He answered the bell.
And he *would let in whoever came a-calling:*
Saints so holy, scamps so appalling.
" Old man Ahab leaves his card.
Elisha and the bears are a-waiting in the yard . . . ."

NICHOLAS VACHEL LINDSAY, *The Daniel Jazz*

Hit Parade

All the big, well-known Social Aid and Pleasure Clubs turned out for that last big parade I saw in New Orleans. They all tried to outdo each other and they certainly looked swell. Among the clubs represented were the The Bulls, The Hobgoblins, The Zulus, The Tammanys, The Young Men Twenties (Zutty Singleton's club), The Merry-Go-Rounds, The Deweys, The Tulane Club, The Young Men Vidalias, The Money Wasters, The Jolly Boys, The Turtles, The Original Swells, The San Jacintos, The Autocrats, The Frans Sa Mee Club, The Co-operatives, The Economys, The Odd Fellows, The Masons . . .

To watch those clubs parade was an irresistible and absolutely unique experience. All the members wore full-dress uniforms, and with those beautiful silk ribbons streaming from their shoulders they were a magnificent sight. At the head of the parade rode the aides, in full-dress suits and mounted on fine horses with ribbons around their heads. The brass band followed, shouting a hot swing march as everyone jumped for joy. The members of the club marched behind the band, wearing white felt hats, white silk shirts (the very best silk), and mohair trousers. I had spent my life in New Orleans, but every time one of those clubs paraded I would second-line them all day long.

LOUIS ARMSTRONG, *Satchmo*

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CHANCE AT THE WHEEL

Ruthlessness had always worked before

by VICTOR CANNING

WHAT the eye doesn't see—the police can never be told. That was the motto of Max Lustrier. And as far as he was concerned, it was a profitable one. He had a nice little villa up in the hills behind Nice, a pleasant circle of friends, a bank balance that increased each year, and a mind free of anxiety. All these things were the result of his own cleverness, his patience, which amounted almost to talent, and his stubborn refusal ever to leave the slightest detail of his operations to chance.

He came now down the wide corridor of the casino and paused for a moment before the polished oak door of the secretary's office. He glanced up and down the corridor to make sure it was empty, and then with a gloved hand reached for the door handle.

He went in and was halfway across the room before the secretary turned and saw him. But the secretary never saw the real Max Lustrier. When he was working, Max never showed himself. All the secretary saw was a tallish, rather slim woman, heavily made up, dressed in a loose green summer coat with a flash of white dress showing; a woman with an attractive, smiling face under a crown of loose brown curls.

The secretary said, " Mademoiselle? What can I do for you? "

Max's answer was in action. His hand came from his coat-pocket and a blackjack hit the secretary on the side of the skull. The man went down, sliding from his chair into a heap on the floor.

Max ignored him. Willowy and effeminate he might be, but there was nothing soft in his character. Four weeks of patient study and watching had gone towards this moment, and each step he took had been carefully planned. By tomorrow morning he would be back at his villa and his friends would be asking him if he had had a pleasant trip to Paris.

There was a slim green briefcase at the side of the secretary's desk. Stamped across the flap in tiny gold letters were the words *Casino Municipal de Rocville.* Max picked this up, and without opening it, turned back to the door. He knew what was in it—most of the casino takings for that day, enough to keep him comfortably for a long time. Max knew so much about the casino,

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four weeks' worth of knowledge, four weeks' worth of patient study, and not a thing left to chance.

He slipped out of the room, went down the corridor, through the hallway, with the murmur of voices coming to him from the gaming-rooms, and out into the night. He held the case loosely at his side, the gold letters turned towards him.

The commissionaire at the foot of the steps wished him good night, the car-park attendant brought his grey Citroën car, took his tip, and Max drove off. There was nothing unusual about this. He had been doing it every night for weeks, even down to carrying the green case. But the other nights it had been his own case and not the casino's.

Max took the coast road back to Nice, fifty miles away, and as he drove he whistled gently to himself, and the green case lay on the seat at his side. Some way outside Rocville he swung off the road up a side track and drew into the dark shadow of a clump of pines. Once a job was done, he liked to become the real Max Lustrier as soon as possible. He pulled a suitcase from the back of the car.

He changed from his woman's clothes into his own clothes—a neat grey suit, dark tie, and soft hat. Very carefully he cleaned the make-up from his face. He put his woman's clothes and the wig in the suitcase and five minutes later was on his way again.

An hour ahead on the coast road was a spot where he could stop and walk out onto the cliffs. The suitcase, with the empty briefcase inside it and the woman's clothes, would be dropped into the sea. A few heavy stones inside would make it sink . . . and that would be the end of Mademoiselle X.

The car, which he had bought second-hand in Rocville, he would leave there too. All he had to do then was to get into his own car, which was waiting for him parked a little farther along the road, and drive off into obscurity.

It had worked that way before, and it would work that way again, Max was sure. Nothing to chance, nothing to luck, every step and move that Max made was deliberately calculated and carried out ruthlessly. For Max was ruthless. Once or twice in the past, when the plan demanded it, Max had had no hesitation in using the automatic which he now wore strapped under his armpit. Max, with the mild, slightly feminine face, would kill—but only if the plan demanded it.

So Max drove on, contented, and a little elated, as he always was at the end of a job. It was late now, past midnight, and there was nothing on the road, and the villages showed no lights as he swept through them. Away to his right, through the pines, the

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Mediterranean washed lazily against the red rocks. And then, without warning, chance took a hand.

Max was doing about sixty when one of the front tyres punctured. The car skidded, hit the kerb, bucked, and the next moment was off the road and rolling down a steep incline, smashing through myrtle and broom bushes. Max was flung clear of the car. His head hit something and then all was blackness.

When Max came to, it was early morning. The sun was just topping the pines, the birds were singing, and his head was aching. Max struggled to a sitting position and looked round. The car was lying on its side at the bottom of a disused railway cutting which followed the road at this point. It was well screened from the road by bushes and trees. Cushions and seats were scattered around, and the sun glinted on broken glass.

A couple of yards from Max lay the suitcase. It had burst open. The green coat and the white dress trailed from it, and the briefcase lay close by.

Max felt himself all over. He was dizzy and weak, but he had no injury except a bruise at the back of his head. His first instinct was to get to the suitcase and put his things back in it, but the moment he moved, a wave of faintness swept over him.

He sat still and then, his old caution and carefulness returning, decided to work out his position. So long as he got rid of the suitcase and the briefcase, he was all right. Once he had disposed of them, he could walk along to his own car, which would take him about half an hour. The grey Citroën would be found—but there the trail would end.

The thought of the walk to the car was unpleasant. Then he remembered the flask of brandy he carried in his inside pocket. A swig of that would set him right.

He was reaching for it when he saw the man. He was coming towards Max up the small path that ran along the bottom of the disused track; a tall, burly figure in sun-glasses, wearing blue trousers, loose white jacket, and sandals. He was an oldish man with a large, leonine face, and a fine head of white hair. His whole appearance was dignified and easy.

Max, his brandy flask half out, knew that he had no time to get to his suitcase and close it. For the first time in his professional career he was forced to deal with things as they came. And he knew, there and then, that it was unfortunate for this stranger that he had come along at this moment.

Max called to him, and the man came over and stood above him, looking down at him, leaning on his stick. He showed no surprise at the sight of Max and the smashed car.

"You're in trouble?" The voice was slow and cultured.

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" Obviously." Max was barely polite. For him this man was a problem already settled. " Here, give me a hand up."

He reached out a hand, but at that moment the wave of faintness hit him again. He tried to get the brandy flask up to his lips but failed, and then he swam away on a cloud of blackness.

When he came round, the stranger was kneeling by him, holding his shoulders and forcing brandy into him. The bite of the spirit struck right through Max and brought him to life.

He sat up, took the flask himself, had another swig, and then said: " This is a damned mess, isn't it? Had a puncture and came charging off the road. Might have killed myself."

" You were lucky, but you're clearly very weak. We'd better get you over to my place . . ." The man rose slowly to his feet and reached down a hand for Max. Max took it and stood up. Strength was coming back to him every moment.

" This way." The man reached out to take Max's elbow.

Max, thinking hard, said, " I must get my case first."

" Of course." The man waited while Max went over, repacked the suitcase and then came back with it in one hand and the briefcase in the other.

" Is the case heavy? Shall I help you? "

" I can manage, thanks."

Max spoke more reasonably now. His mind was busy. The man had watched every movement he had made, watched him pack the dress and coat back into the case. He was thinking that to deal with this stranger he had to know something about him. He couldn't afford to take any chances.

He didn't want to find himself at the man's house with other people about, but a few questions as they went slowly down the path with the man ahead of him told him all he wanted to know. He was in luck. The man—who introduced himself as a Monsieur Charnot—lived by himself in a small villa by the sea, less than a hundred yards away. Max decided to do the job there.

The villa was small, set almost at the top of the cliff and with a large living-room that looked out over the sea. Charnot showed Max the bathroom and then went off to make some coffee. Max washed and tidied himself up and his mind was working quickly.

At the moment the green briefcase and the clothes that had spilt from the suitcase meant nothing to Charnot. But once the details of the robbery were in the paper and on the radio, Charnot would remember them. And he would be able to give a description of Max to the police. That description would link Max to the grey Citroën. And the police would know that they were looking for a man and not a woman.

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It was a chance Max could not afford to take. Charnot—Max decided—was the link that would lead the police to him. The link had to be broken. All the police were going to find was a wrecked car, later to be identified as the one used in the robbery, and a dead man in a villa. And they would be looking for an attractive woman who had disappeared into thin air.

Max patted the revolver under his jacket and then, refreshed, his mind clear, went out into the living-room. There was a tray with coffee on the table and Charnot was standing at the window, watching the sea. The suitcase was on the floor by the door and the green briefcase was on top of it, with the words *Casino Municipal de Rocville* uppermost. But this was a detail that gave Max no worry now. After he had dealt with Charnot, he would get rid of the two cases.

He poured himself a cup of coffee and said, "You're very snug here."

"Yes . . . this is my little hermitage. I am very happy here. Very happy." Charnot turned and smiled at Max. "But then I am old and there are few things I want from the world . . . books, music, and a little food and drink."

"That wouldn't be enough for me."

Charnot laughed. "It wasn't enough for me when I was younger. Are you feeling better?"

"I'm all right."

"There is a telephone in the hall if you wish to ring up the police or a garage about your car."

"When I've finished my coffee."

Charnot nodded, turning back to the window. Max moved up close to him. Charnot went on staring through his dark sunglasses at the glittering sea. The large face was fixed in a tranquil smile. There was something about this man that disturbed Max and set him in opposition to him. He was so calm, so unruffled, taking things as they came and, apparently, asking nothing from life.

Max reached inside his jacket and with a tug pulled his revolver from its leather holster. Charnot turned. He faced Max and the smile was still on his face.

"Why have you taken out a revolver?" he asked.

Max's lips twisted in a humourless grin. "To protect myself," he said.

"From me?"

"That's it. From you. To protect myself I have to kill you." The automatic came up, levelled at Charnot's breast.

"Really? What harm could I do you? I have shown myself only too ready to help you."

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Max stepped back. When he fired he did not want blood on himself.

He knew where he was now, and he was confident. He said, "Some time today the papers and the radio will be full of a robbery that took place last night at the Rocville Casino—" Max tipped his head towards the suitcase and the briefcase—"a robbery carried out by a woman dressed in the green coat and the white dress which you've seen and driving a grey Citroën with the same number-plates as the one up in the railway cutting. I wouldn't want you to enlighten them that the woman was a man, a man you could describe very well."

Charnot did not say anything for a moment, and then very gently he began to laugh.

The noise irritated Max. "Shut up!" Charnot shook his head and behind him the sun glinted on the blue sea. "If you wanted to shut me up—you have your revolver," he said evenly.

Max took him at his word. He wanted this thing done and finished. He pressed the trigger of the automatic.

There was a dull click. He had no time for surprise at this, for Charnot jumped on him. He went down with Charnot on top of him, and Charnot was heavy and powerful and Max was no match for him. A great fist slammed against his jaw and Max went out.

When he came to, he was propped up on a settee with his wrists and feet bound. Charnot was sitting on a chair not far from him, holding the revolver. He was carefully feeding bullets back into the magazine.

As Max groaned and moved, Charnot looked up and smiled. He tossed the automatic in the palm of his great hand.

"When you fainted by your car and I lifted you up to give you brandy," he said calmly, "I felt this gun under your jacket. I do not trust people who carry guns so I emptied it for you. At least you will not be charged with murder . . . not my murder, anyway. But what a lot of trouble you have given yourself—and so unnecessarily. You could have walked out of this villa with nothing to fear from me."

"You think I believe that? You can't take chances in my business," snarled Max.

Charnot shook his head. "Chance, my dear fellow, is part of life. You can't rule it out—and this time it worked against you. You could have walked out of here without a worry in the world. I couldn't have described you, or your suitcase, or anything about you. I've been blind for the last ten years.

"That's why I live here alone, happy in this little world which I know so well that I can move about it without the need for

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eyes. My eyes are in my ears and my fingers, my ears that heard you pull a revolver from a creaking leather holster, my fingers that first discovered and distrusted that revolver."

Charnot got up and began to walk towards the telephone in the hallway.

★ ★ ★

WARDING THEM OFF

It takes more than an apple a day to keep some of these doctors and nurses at bay. The materia's medica, and no one's immune. Don't let the sick leave before the register is complete. Say ninety-nine, and then add one point for the name of the doctor or nurse in each case, one for the title, and one for the author of the book, making a high-fever total of 123!

The answers are on page 111.

1. *If you want to please one or other of this pair who nussed together, don't forget to leave the cowcumber and the bottle on the chimley-piece for when they are so dispoged.*

2. *A doctor with plenty to hide: his double life has become proverbial.*

3. *Not a very sympathetic nurse, but she was the gaoler's daughter, and in this country illness of any sort was considered to be highly criminal and immoral.*

4. *It was his grandmother's will that made this young man continue for as long as possible to be "ploughed, plucked, or pipped" in his exams.*

5. *The title sounds like a surgeon's blunder, but it was the nurse that died.*

6. *When asked to minister to a mind diseased, this early psychiatrist recommended religion.*

7. *This Arab practitioner was allowed to examine Lazarus, but his final verdict was: "It is strange."*

8. *This learnèd and temperate praktisour knew that in phisik gold is a cordial; therefore he lovede gold in special.*

★ ★ ★

ARGOSY FOR H.M. FORCES

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

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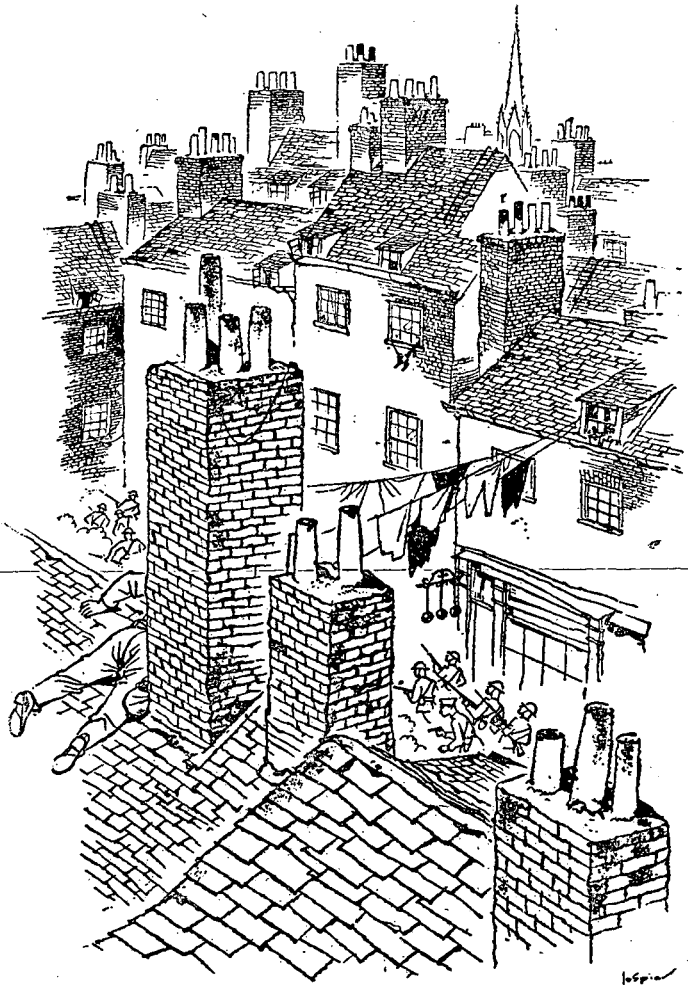

Over the roofs I went with me last bomb

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MACAGONY'S FIST

When Irish eyes are smiling watch your step

by GERALD KERSH

HAVING left theological college to become a salesman of corsets, and having left that job on account of an unconquerable habit of practical demonstration, Macagony became a welter-weight boxer. His career in this line is not recorded in the history of the ring. His enemies suggest that he hit the referee with a stout bottle because he was disqualified for biting. He turned up eventually, in 1909, in Nevada, where he went to work in a copper mine.

Here he found his real vocation—blowing things up. He learnt exactly what to do with gelignite. If you wanted to know just where to place your ballistite cartridge so as to remove the front of the foreman's house, or precisely how much damage could be done with an oil drum packed with black powder, you went to Macagony.

He carried with him a high-explosive atmosphere. He had one of those tense Irish faces, and the traditional Irish nature, which is compounded of equal parts of poetry and picric acid . . . the soul of Dion O'Banion, who sang *The Rose of Tralee* to his aged mother before rushing out to put five bullets into John Dougherty —John Dougherty, who believed in fairies, and murdered Anna Kaniff with an ice-pick.

As soon as the Civil War broke out, Macagony went to Dublin to throw some bombs. He must have been the original Irish Troubles. I lost sight of him at that period, and quite forgot him until I met him some time ago in Hooligan's Bar.

Macagony had changed; aged, lost flesh, and acquired a hunted look.

Moreover, there was something wrong with his right hand. It appeared to be horribly deformed—bulbous, like a turnip, and covered with a woollen thing like a sock.

"Nice to see you again," he said, and added, in the same breath, "Loan me five."

That transaction over, the talk turned to the Revolution. I asked him how he had done.

He replied, "Great, great! I blew up three armoured cars.

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Once, I threw seventy-seven Mills bombs in sixty-three seconds, by the clock."

"Is that how you hurt your hand?"

Macagony became furtive. Then, pocketing my five dollars with his left hand, he soared into a good mood. An Irish good mood. When Irish eyes are smiling, watch your step: and when you hear the lilt of Irish laughter, take care to arm yourself either with a quart bottle or a fire extinguisher.

"That . . ." he began; then seized my coat and whispered, "swear on the head of your mother that you'll keep your lip buttoned."

"You bet I'll keep my lip buttoned."

"I'd get twenty years."

"Do I talk?"

"All right, listen, then. You know I have always liked a good explosion?"

"Didn't you once put a bicycle-pump filled with gunpowder under my chair?"

"Don't interrupt. Well, you know I was in the Troubles, eh? Well, it was great. I used to go about with a sawed-down forty-four in me trouser-pocket, and a Mauser on a lanyard down me leg . . . Bombs? Unlimited! Sure, I once dropped one down a tuba in a military band. Boy, oh boy, have you ever heard a pineapple explode inside a tuba? You haven't lived, man, till you've heard that. Ahhh . . ."

Macagony sighted an acquaintance—one of the waiters—and leapt up to exchange conversation.

"You'd think he was a baby-face," he said, on returning, "but with these two eyes, I've seen him shoot six with his own hand when we burnt Dunville's Wharf . . . What was I saying? Oh yes, me mitt."

"You hurt it in an explosion?"

"I did not. It was a different thing altogether. Me and some of the boys was making a bit of a raid on the Orpheus Cinema, see? There was Flash Guinness, there was Guts McGrath, there was—"

"Well, go on."

"Well, first of all, we gets a couple of petrol tins, see? And I fills them nice and tight with sticks of dynamite, see? And I fits a detonator in each cap, runs a wire, presses the button, and up she goes. See?"

"Very nice."

"I wish you could have been there. There wasn't an unbroken window for miles around. It was raining bits of Black and Tan

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for hours afterwards. The dogs in the streets got into the habit of sitting on their haunches with open mouths, making a meal off the falling bits."

"As long as you were kind to animals."

"Sure. Well, we start to make a getaway, when what should we see but a couple of detachments of the Black and Tan coming down from both ends of the street? So we broke into a house, and got on the roof to fight it out. See?"

"Uhuh."

"I had a couple of tram conductors' money-bags full of grenades, and we all had our guns. See? So we held the roof. It was a sight worth seeing. You could hardly see a hand in front of you, for bullets. Murphy got his first. You fire a rifle at a tiled roof, and the bullet will ricochet round and round for weeks. It's not fair.

"Me, I did me best with the bombs, but we were outnumbered, see? They got on the other roof, and we fought a duel from chimney to chimney. It was great. But they were coming in on us, and I was down to me last bomb. There were more of them than us, and most of us nicked but me, so it was time to break for it, and me lead them a chase if I could. Over the roofs I went with me last bomb, slipping and sliding until I couldn't call a breath me own."

"Did you get away?"

"In a manner of speaking. Tucked into the gutter of a roof like a spent leaf. Lying there on me belly, waiting in the dark. And soon enough they showed up, the whole lot of soldiers, checking the streets and the buildings below. Well, I waited till I should see the best chance to use the last grenade. I got me finger in the ring of the pin, and me hand around the bomb, and I waited. Then, at the very last moment, when a bunch of them looked to be getting together, I pulled the pin and threw it away."

"Did you get them all?"

"Not a blessed one. I didn't throw the bomb. I'm too busy ducking back out of sight of the searchlight they swung up on me building! Not a move out of me or I'm done for! Stuck there, see? Can't move for fear of getting shot or falling off the roof. And that blinding light—I couldn't see a target if there was one!"

"What did you do?"

"What could I do but wait? With the rain belting me fierce as arrows. Hours before, the light goes off; and then I hear it's the soldiers themselves stirring in the rooms below. They've taken up quarters in the house."

"Well?"

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" So there I am, me hand tight round the bomb, not daring to move or make a sound. I kept holding down the spring; if I'd let go I'd be in hell in three seconds."

" Good lord! What did you do? "

" Nothing. I kept tight hold. I was on that blasted roof for five days. I didn't get a wink of sleep. I lost me nerve. I didn't dare do anything . . ." He winced.

I said: " Five days! "

" And nights," he said. " Of the foulest, dirtiest weather. Oh, I was stiff as a board when they finally left. It was all I could do to get down off there."

" It's a wonder you made it."

" I know. I was that cramped up. And me arm—me muscles had atrophied, or something. I couldn't open me hand." Macagony tapped his covered right fist.

" And what happened then? "

" Nothing. Nothing, me boy. Nothing. I resigned meself to me fate, and here I am."

" And the bomb? "

" Here it is to this day," said Macagony, pointing to his bulbous hand, " but don't say a word to anybody. I'd get twenty years if you did . . . Hey! Wait a minute! Where are you going to, in such a hurry? "

★ ★ ★

RED WINE—WHITE BREAD

Someone said in Paris,
This is France—
Red wine and white bread.
And if a happy chance
Should add more
To this pleasant store,
Still always there will be
Red wine and white bread.

Here remembering Paris do we talk
With Seine and Champs Elysées in our speech,
And you the loveliest of all in reach;
I share the red wine of a lingering sun
Before the last late light depart,
And you, beloved, close—
White bread for my hunger—
Feed my heart.

PÁDRAIG O'HORAN

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LIME-VANILLA ICE

She was the first cool snow that would live a thousand summers long

by RAY BRADBURY

IT was a warm July afternoon in the ice-cream parlour of Green Town, Illinois, when Richard Forrester drove up in his dusty Ford and stepped in from the blazing street to ask for some extraordinary ice-cream.

Seated at the cool marble fountain, in the grotto of soda odours, in the smell of clean stone and vanilla coldness, he asked for a recitation of unusual ices, and when the fountain man came to *Old-fashioned lime-vanilla ice*—" That's it! " said Richard Forrester.

While waiting, he whirled slowly on the rotating stool. The silver spigots, the gleaming mirrors, the revolving ceiling fans, the green blinds over the small windows, the wire chairs passed under his moving gaze. He stopped turning. His eyes touched upon the face and form of Miss Linella Simms, ninety-five years old, ice-cream spoon in hand, ice-cream in mouth.

" Young man," she said, " you are a person of courage, stamina, and taste. It takes a gentleman of fearless emotions to order, straight out, lime-vanilla ice."

He bowed his head solemnly to her.

" Come and sit down," she said. " We'll talk about odd ice-creams and things of that sort. Don't be afraid, I'll foot the bill."

Smiling, he carried his ice to her table and sat down.

" Well," she said. " You're Richard Forrester, aren't you? "

" Yes, ma'am," he said.

" I've heard a lot about you." She moved her spoon to her mouth deliberatively. " Quite the rascal, I believe."

" I know you," he said. " You're Linella Simms."

" The oldest maiden lady on record, more's the pity."

" I was in love with you once," he said.

" Now, that's the way I like a new conversation to open." She dug quietly at her ice-cream. " That's grounds for another meeting. No, don't tell me where or when or how you were in love with me. We'll save that for next time. I have to get home now. You work for the *Chronicle*, don't you? Well, come to my house tomorrow afternoon for tea. And just so we'll both have

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something for our curiosity to chew on, Mr. Forrester, *you* remind *me* of a gentleman I went out with almost a century ago."

She sat opposite him, and it was like talking to a grey and lost and quivering moth. The voice came from far away inside the greyness and the oldness, wrapped in the powders of pressed flowers and ancient butterflies.

"Well," she rose, "will you come tomorrow?"

"I most certainly will," he replied.

And she went off into the town, leaving him there to gaze after her.

Richard Forrester spent the next morning checking some sports items for his newspaper. He had time at lunch for a quart of toffee ice-cream and an egg sandwich, did some fishing in a river outside the town, caught some small fish, and threw them back happily, but did all these things with his eyes fixed on some distant point.

It was almost automatically, as three o'clock approached, that he found himself inside his car, his hands on the steering-wheel, turning in at a certain address, driving up the circular sweep, and stopping by an ivy-covered porch. Letting himself out, he was conscious of the fact that his car was like his pipe—old, chewed-on, unkempt, in this huge green garden by this freshly painted, three-storey Victorian house.

He saw a faint, mothlike movement at the far end of the garden and heard a whispery cry, and saw that Miss Simms was waiting for him, removed across time and distance, seated alone, the tea-service glittering its soft silver surfaces.

"This is the first time a woman has ever been ready and waiting," he said, walking up. "It is also," he admitted, "the first time *I* have been on time."

"Why is that?" she asked, propped back in a wicker chair.

"I don't know," he admitted.

"Well!" She began to pour out tea. "To start things off, what do you think of the world?"

"I don't know anything."

"The beginning of wisdom, as they say. When you're seventeen, you know everything. When you're *twenty*-seven if you *still* know everything, you're still seventeen."

"You seem to have learnt quite a lot over the years."

"It is the privilege of old people to seem to know everything. But it's an act and a mask, like every other act and mask. Between ourselves, we old ones wink at each other and smile, saying, 'How do you like *my* mask, *my* act, *my* certainty? Isn't life a play? Don't I play it well?'"

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They both laughed quietly. He sat back and let the laughter come naturally from his mouth for the first time in many months.

When they quieted, she held her teacup in her two hands and looked into it. "It's lucky we met so late. I wouldn't have wanted you to meet me when I was twenty-one and full of foolishness."

"They have special laws for pretty girls of twenty-one."

"So you think I was pretty?"

He nodded good-humouredly.

"But how can you tell?" she asked. "When you meet a dragon that has eaten a swan, do you guess by the few feathers left round the mouth? That's what it is: a body like this is a dragon, all scales and folds. So the dragon ate the white swan. I haven't seen her for years. I can't even remember what she looks like. I *feel* her, though. She's safe inside, still alive; the essential swan hasn't changed a feather.

"Do you know, there are some mornings in spring, or autumn, when I wake and think, 'I'll run across the fields into the woods and pick wild strawberries!' or 'I'll swim in the lake,' or 'I'll dance all night tonight until dawn!' And then, in a rage, I discover I'm in this old, ruined dragon. I'm the princess in the crumbled tower, no way out, waiting for her Prince Charming."

"You should have written books."

"My dear boy, I *have* written. What else was there for an old maid? I was a crazy creature with a headful of carnival spangles until I was thirty, and then the only man I ever really cared for stopped waiting and married someone else. So in spite, in anger at myself, I told myself I deserved my fate for not having married when the best chance was at hand.

"I started travelling. My luggage was snowed under by blizzards of labels. I have been alone in Paris, alone in Vienna, alone in London, and all in all, it is very much like being alone in Green Town, Illinois. Oh, you have plenty of time to think, improve your manners, sharpen your conversation. But I sometimes think I could easily trade a verb tense or a curtsy for some company that would stay for a thirty-year week-end."

They drank their tea.

"Oh, such a rush of self-pity," she said, good-naturedly. "About you, now. You're thirty-one and still not married?"

"Let me put it this way," he said. "Women who act and think and talk like you are rare."

"My," she said seriously, "you mustn't expect young women to talk like me. They're much too young, first of all. And secondly, the average man runs helter-skelter the moment he finds anything like a brain in a lady. You've probably met quite a few

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brainy ones who hid it most successfully from you. You'll have to pry around a bit to find the odd beetle. Lift a few boards."

They were laughing again.

" I shall probably be a meticulous old bachelor," he said.

" No, no, you mustn't do that. It wouldn't be right. You shouldn't even be here this afternoon."

" Where should I be? "

" Swimming, picking strawberries. If you won't do them for yourself, do them for me. Where would you like to go, what would you really like to do with your life? "

" See Istanbul, Port Said, Nairobi, Budapest. Write a book. Smoke too many cigarettes. Fall off a cliff but get caught in a tree halfway down. Get shot at a few times in a dark alley on a Moroccan midnight. Love a beautiful woman."

" Well, I don't think I can provide them all," she said. " But I can tell you about many of those places. And if you'd care to run across my front lawn tonight about eleven and if I'm still awake, I'll fire off a Civil War musket at you. Do you suppose that would satisfy your masculine urge for adventure? "

" That would be just fine."

" Where would you like to go first? I can take you there, you know. Just name it. London? Cairo? Cairo makes your face turn on like a light. So let's go to Cairo. Just relax, now. Put some of that nice tobacco in that pipe of yours and sit back."

He sat back, lit his pipe, half smiling, relaxing, and listened, and she began to talk. " Cairo," she said . . .

An hour passed in jewels, and alleys, and winds from the Egyptian desert. The sun was golden and the Nile was muddy where it lapped down to the delta, and there was someone very young and very quick at the top of the pyramid, laughing, calling to him to come on up the shadowy side into the sun, and he was climbing, she putting her hand down to help him up the last step; and then they were laughing on camelback, loping towards the great stretched bulk of the Sphinx; and late at night, in the native quarter, there was the tinkle of small hammers on bronze and silver, and music from some stringed instruments fading away and away and away . . .

Richard Forrester opened his eyes. Miss Linella Simms had finished the adventure and they were home again, very familiar to each other, in the garden, the tea cold in the silver pot, the biscuits dried in the late sun.

He sighed and stretched and sighed again. " I've never been so comfortable."

" Nor I."

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" I've kept you late. I should have gone an hour ago."

" You know I loved every minute of it. But what you should see in an old silly woman . . ."

He lay back in his chair and half closed his eyes and looked at her. He squinted his eyes so the merest filament of light came through. He tilted his head ever so little, this way, then that.

" What are you doing? " she asked uncomfortably.

He continued looking. " If you do this just right," he murmured, " you can adjust, make allowances."

To himself, he was thinking, You can erase lines, adjust the time factor, turn back the years.

Suddenly he started.

" What's wrong? " she asked.

But then it was gone. He opened his eyes to catch it. That was a mistake. He should have stayed back, idling, erasing, his eyes gently half closed.

" For just a moment," he said, " I saw it."

" Saw what? "

The swan, of course, he thought. His mouth must have formed the words.

The next instant she was sitting very straight in her chair. Her hands were in her lap, rigid. Her eyes were fixed upon him, and as he watched, feeling helpless, they cupped and brimmed full.

" I'm sorry," he said, " terribly sorry."

" No, don't be." She held herself rigid and did not touch her face or her eyes; her hands remained, one on top of the other, holding on.

" You'd better go now. Yes, you may come tomorrow, but go now."

He walked off through the garden. He could not bring himself to look back.

The weeks burnt from July into August, and he was invited to teas, to suppers, to lunches. They sat talking through the long green afternoons. They talked of art, of literature, of life, of politics. They ate ice-creams and squabs and drank good wines.

" I don't care what anyone says," she said. " And people *are* saying things, aren't they? "

He shifted uneasily.

" I knew it. A woman's never safe from gossip, even when she's ninety-five."

" I could stop visiting."

" Oh no! " she cried, and recovered. In a quieter voice, she said, " You know you can't do that. You know you don't care what they think, don't you? As long as we know it's all right? "

" I don't care," he said.

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"Now—" She settled back—"where shall it be this time? Paris, I think, Paris."

"Paris," he said, nodding quietly.

"Well," she began, "it's the year 1885, and we're at sea. Now we're coming into Marseilles . . ."

Here she was on a bridge, looking into the clear waters of the Seine, and here he was, suddenly, a moment later, beside her, looking down at the tides of summer flowing past. Here she was with an apéritif in her talcum-white fingers, and here he was, with amazing quickness, bending towards her to tap her glass with his. His face appeared in mirrored halls at Versailles, over steaming *smörgäsbords* in Stockholm, and they counted the barber poles in the canals in Venice.

The things she had done alone, they were now doing together.

One late afternoon at the end of August, they sat staring at one another.

"Do you realize," he said, "I've seen you nearly every day?"

"Impossible!"

"I've enjoyed it immensely."

"Yes, but there are so many young girls . . ."

"You're everything they are not—kind, intelligent, witty."

"Nonsense. Kindness and intelligence are the preoccupations of age. Being cruel and thoughtless is far more fun when you're twenty."

She paused and drew a breath. "Now I'm going to embarrass you. Do you recall that first afternoon we met in the soda fountain, you said that you had had some degree of—shall we say affection—for me at one time? You've never mentioned it again. Now I'm forced to ask you to explain the whole uncomfortable thing."

"That's embarrassing," he protested.

"Out with it!"

"I saw your picture once, years ago."

"I never let my picture be taken."

"This was an old one, taken when you were nineteen."

"Oh, that. It's quite a joke. Each time I give to a charity or attend a ball, they dust that picture off and print it. Everyone in town laughs, even *I*."

"It's cruel of the paper."

"No. I told them, 'If you want a picture of me, use the one taken back in 1878. Let them remember me that way. Keep the lid down, in the name of the good Lord, during the service.'"

"I'll tell you all about it."

He paused a moment. He was remembering the picture now,

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and it was very clear in his mind. There was time, here in the garden, to think of every aspect of the photograph and of Linella Simms, just nineteen, posing for the first time, alone and beautiful. He thought of her quiet, shyly smiling face.

It was the face of spring, it was the face of summer, it was the warmness of clover breath, it was the tenderness of ears. Pomegranate glowed in her lips, and the noon sky in her eyes. She was the sweetness of April grass and the little forests of mint you found in woodlands. She was the first strawberry on your tongue, and to touch her face was that always new experience of opening your window one December morning, early, and putting out your hand to the first white, cool powdering of snow that had come, silently, with no announcement, in the night.

And all this, this breath-warmness and plum-tenderness, was held for ever in one miracle of photographic chemistry that no clock winds could blow upon to change one hour or one second, and this fine, first, cool white snow would never melt but live a thousand summers.

That was the photograph; that was the way he knew her.

"When I first saw that picture, it was a simple, straightforward picture—the hair style was simple—I didn't know it had been taken so long ago," he said. "The item in the paper said something about Linella Simms opening the Town Ball that night. I tore the picture from the paper. I carried it with me all day. I intended going to the ball.

"Then, late in the afternoon, someone saw me looking at the picture. They told me about it. How the picture of the beautiful girl had been taken in 1878 and used every year since by the paper. And they said I shouldn't go to the Town Ball that night, carrying that picture, and looking for you."

They sat in the garden for a long minute. He glanced over at her face. There was no way to tell what she was thinking. Her face showed nothing.

She rocked for a little while in her chair and then said softly, "Shall we have some more tea? *There* you are."

They sat sipping tea. Then she reached over and patted his arm. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For wanting to come to find me at the dance, for clipping out my picture. Thank you so very much."

They walked about the garden.

"And now," she said, "it's my turn. Do you remember I mentioned a certain young man who once paid me attentions, seventy years ago? Oh, he's been dead thirty years now, at least, but when he was very young and very handsome, he rode off on

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a fast horse for days or on summer nights over the meadows around town. He had a healthy, wild face, always sunburnt. His hands were always cut, and he fumed like a chimney and walked as if he were going to fly apart, wouldn't keep a job, quit those he had when he felt like it, and one day he sort of rode off away from me because I was even wilder than he and wouldn't settle down, and that was that.

"I never thought the day would come when I would see him alive again. But you're pretty much alive, you spill ashes about as he did, you're clumsy and graceful combined, I know everything you're going to do before you do it, but after you've done it I'm always surprised. Reincarnation's a lot of milk-mush to me, but the other day I felt, What if I called, 'Robert, Robert!' to you on the street? Would Richard Forrester turn round?"

"I don't know," he said.

"Neither do I. That's what makes life interesting."

Summer was almost over. The first cool touch of autumn moved slowly through the town, and there was a softening and a gradual burning fever of colour in every tree, a flush and colouring in the hills, and the colour of lions in the wheat fields.

Richard Forrester walked across the garden on one early-September afternoon to find Linella Simms writing with great care at the tea-table.

She looked up. "I've been writing you a letter," she said.

"Well, I've saved you the trouble."

"No, this is a special letter. Look at it." She showed him the blue envelope. "Remember how it looks. When you receive this, you'll know I'm dead."

"That's no way to talk, is it?"

"Sit down and listen to me."

He sat.

"My dear Richard," she said, under the parasol shade, "in a few days, I shall be dead. No"—she put up her hand—"I don't want you to say a thing. I'm not afraid. When you have lived as long as I have, you lose that, too. I never liked lobster in my life, mainly because I'd never tried it. On my eightieth birthday, I tried it. I can't say I am greatly excited over lobster yet, but I have no doubt as to its taste now, and I don't fear it. I dare say death will be a lobster, too, and I can come to terms with it."

She motioned with her hands. "But enough of that. The important thing is I shan't be seeing you again. There will be no service. I believe a woman who has passed through that particular door has as much right to privacy as a woman who has retired for the night."

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" You can't predict death," he said at last.

" For fifty years, I've watched the grandfather clock in the hall, Richard. After it is wound, I can predict to the hour when it will stop. I'm no different. I can feel my machinery slowing down, the last weights shifting. Oh, please don't look that way —please don't."

" I can't help it," he said.

" We've had a nice time, haven't we? It has been very special here, talking every day."

She turned the blue envelope in her hands. " I've always known the quality of love was in the mind, even though the body sometimes refuses this knowledge. The body lives for itself. It lives to feed and to sleep. It's essentially nocturnal. But what of the mind which is born of the sun, Richard, and must spend thousands of hours of a lifetime awake and aware?

" Can you balance the body, that pitiful, frail thing of night against a whole lifetime of sun and intellect? I don't know. I only know there has been your mind here and my mind here, and the afternoons have been like none I can remember. There is still so much to talk about, but we must save it for another time."

" We don't seem to have much time now."

" No, but perhaps there *will* be another time. Time is so strange and life is twice as strange. The cogs miss, the wheels turn, and lives interlock too early or too late. I've lived too long, that is certain. And you were born either too early or too late. It was a terrible bit of timing. But perhaps I am being punished for being a silly girl. Anyway, the next time round, the timing might be functioning again. Meanwhile, you must find a nice girl and be married and be happy. But you must promise me one thing."

" Anything."

" You must promise me not to live to be too old. If it is at all convenient, die before you're fifty. I advise this simply because there is no telling when another Linella Simms might be born. It would be dreadful, wouldn't it, if you lived on to be ninety years old and some afternoon walked down Main Street and saw me standing there, aged twenty-one, and the whole thing out of balance again?

" I don't think we could go through any more afternoons like these we've had, no matter how pleasant, do you? A thousand gallons of tea and fifty million biscuits are enough for one friendship. So you must have an attack of pneumonia some time in about twenty years. For I don't know how long they let you linger on the other side. Perhaps they send you back immediately. But I shall do my best Richard, really I shall. And with

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everything put right and in balance, do you know what might happen?"

"You tell me."

"Some afternoon in 1989 or 1990, a young man will be walking downtown and will stop in the drugstore and order a dish of some unusual ice-cream. A young girl the same age will be sitting there, and when she hears the name of that ice-cream, something will happen. I can't say what or how. *She* won't know why or how, assuredly. Nor will the young man. It will simply be that the name of that ice-cream will be a very good thing to both of them. They'll talk. And later, when they know each other's names, they'll walk out of the drugstore together."

She smiled at him. "This is all very neat, but forgive an old lady for tying things in neat packets. It's a silly trifle to leave you. Now let's talk of something else. Is there any place in the world we haven't travelled to yet? Have we been to Stockholm?"

"Yes, it's a fine town."

"Glasgow? Yes. Where, then?"

"Why not Green Town, Illinois?" he said. "Here. We haven't visited our own town together."

She settled back, and said, "I'll tell you how it was in this town when I was only nineteen, a long time ago . . ."

It was a night in winter, and she was skating lightly over a pond of white-moon ice, her image gliding and whispering under her. It was a night in summer in this town of fire, and heat in the air, in the cheeks, your heart warm, your eyes full of the glowing and shutting-off colour of fireflies.

It was a rustling night in October, and there she stood, pulling taffy from a hook in the kitchen, laughing. And there she was, running on the moss by the river, and swimming in the granite pit beyond the town on a spring night, in the soft, deep, warm waters. And now it was the Fourth of July, with rockets blasting the sky and every porch full of relatives, and a brass band playing somewhere in the park as she glided by, singing.

"Can you see all these things?" asked Linella Simms. "Can you see me doing them and being with them?"

"Yes," said Richard Forrester, eyes closed. "I can see you."

"And then," she said, "and then . . ."

Her voice moved on and on, as the afternoon grew late and the twilight came down very quickly, but her voice went on in the garden and anyone passing on the road, at a far distance, could have heard its moth sound, faintly, faintly . . .

Two days later, on September the fourteenth, Richard Forrester was at his desk in the news office when the letter came.

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He recognized the blue envelope but did not open it. He simply got up, placed the letter in his coat-pocket, put on his hat, and walked out of the office.

" Taking lunch early? " asked a voice.

He didn't hear the voice, but pushed the door shut, and walked round the town for half an hour, the letter in his pocket.

It was a warm day; summer had stayed on for this afternoon in September, to bring everyone out into the town. He turned in at the soda fountain and took a seat at the counter and laid the letter down before him.

He looked out at the broiling yellow sunlight on the concrete pavements and buildings. He looked at the wall calendar. September 14, 1954. He looked at his wrist-watch and felt his heart beat slowly, saw the watch-hand moving slowly, slowly, the calendar frozen there with its one day seeming for ever, the sun lost in the sky and hardly moving towards its sunset.

The warm air turned under the fans over his head. A number of women laughed by the open door and passed out of his vision which was focused beyond them, at the town itself and the high courthouse clock.

He opened the letter and began to read.

He turned slowly on the revolving chair. He tried the words again and again, silently on his tongue, and at last spoke them aloud and repeated them again.

" A dish of lime-vanilla ice," he said. " A dish of lime-vanilla ice."

★ ★ ★

POLONY!

Then suddenly, until now unseen, the mournful, white-capped pyre of Ararat rose, to reduce the rest of the landscape to utter insignificance.

Darkness brought life back to Igdir. As I sat on the pavement, eating my grilled kebab and drinking my bottle of wine, the bells of the decrepit victorias amid the awakening, slow-moving crowd seemed even to bring it a spark of gaiety. Three officers sat near me, confronting platoons of beer-bottles. Presently they invited me to join them, and one of them started to talk of Shakespeare.

" I like very much his play *Stormy Night*."

" *Stormy Night?* "

" Yes, where Ferdinand have Miranda."

" Oh yes, it is very fine."

" But of all I like best *The Omlet*. That is the finest."

LORD KINROSS, *Within the Taurus*

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TIME OF ROSES

A rose is a rose is a rose

GERTRUDE STEIN

There stood the house, waiting. Why should a house wait? Most pretty scenes have something passive about them, but this looked like a trap baited with beauty, set ready to spring. It stood back from the road. Lou put her hand on the gate and, with a touch of bravado, the two filed up the paved path to the door. Each side of the path, hundreds of standard roses bloomed, overcharged with colour, as though this were their one hour. Crimson, coral, blue-pink, lemon and cold white, they disturbed with fragrance the dead air.

In this spell-bound afternoon, with no shadows, the roses glared at the strangers, frighteningly bright. The face of the house was plastered with tea-roses: waxy cream when they opened but with vermilion buds.

ELIZABETH BOWEN, *Look at all those Roses*

Mixed Strain

The red rose whispers of passion,
And the white rose breathes of love;
Oh, the red rose is a falcon,
And the white rose is a dove.

But I send you a cream-white rosebud
With a flush on its petal tips;
For the love that is purest and sweetest
Has a kiss of desire on the lips.

JOHN BOYLE O'REILLY, *A White Rose*

Thorny Problem

At that moment he saw the little scene going on between Lady Dolly and her daughter, and watched it from a distance with much amusement.

"What an exquisite face that child has—that lovely tint like the wild white rose, there is nothing like it. It makes all the women with colour look vulgar," he said, after a prolonged gaze through a friend's field-glass. "Who is she, do you say? Miladi

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Dolly's daughter? Is it possible? I thought Miladi was made herself yesterday in Giroux's shop, and was kept in a wadded box when her mechanism was not wound up. Surely, it is impossible Dolly can ever have stooped to such a homely unartificial thing as maternity. You must be mistaken."

"No. In remote ages she married a cousin. The white wild rose is the result."

"A charming result. A child only, but an exquisite child. It is a pity we are in this costume, or we would go and be presented; though Miladi would not be grateful, to judge by her face now. Poor little Dolly! It is hard to have a daughter—and a daughter that comes to Trouville in August."

OUIDA, *Moths*

Lovely is the Rose

A great dawn-colour rose widening the petals around her gold eye
Peers day and night in the window. She watches us
Breakfasting, lighting lamps, reading, and the children playing, and the dogs by the fire,
She watches earnestly, uncomprehending,
As we stare into the world of trees and roses uncomprehending,
There is a great gulf fixed. But even while
I gaze and the rose at me, my little flower-greedy daughter-in-law
Walks with shears, very blonde and housewifely,
Through the small garden, and suddenly the rose finds herself rootless in-doors.
Now she is part of the life she watched.
—So we: death comes and plucks us: we become part of the living earth
And wind and water whom we so loved. We are they.

ROBINSON JEFFERS, *The Shears*

Dewy

Be quick cried Bernard I have a plan to spend a day near Windsor Castle and we will take our lunch and spend a happy day.

Oh Hurrah shouted Ethel I shall soon be ready as I had my bath last night so wont wash very much now.

No don't said Bernard and added in a rarther fervent tone through the chink of the door you are fresher than the rose my dear no soap could make you fairer.

DAISY ASHFORD, *The Young Visiters*

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Cut to the Heart

Yes, it was a fine rose, the *Conte* said proudly when they praised it, and he would tell the Signora about it. And as they sat there, drinking the wine he offered them, he alluded with the cheerful indifference of old age to his love affair, as though he took for granted that they had heard of it already.

" The Lady lived across the valley there beyond that hill. I was a young man then, for it was many years ago. I used to ride over to see her; it was a long way, but I rode fast, for young men, as no doubt the Signora knows, are impatient. But the Lady was not kind, she would keep me waiting, oh, for hours; and one day when I had waited in the garden where she had told me she would see me, I broke one of her roses, broke a branch from it; and when I saw what I had done, I hid it inside my coat—so—; and when I came home I planted it, and the Signora sees how it has grown. If the Signora admires it, I must give her a cutting to plant also in her garden; I am told the English have beautiful gardens;—green, and not burnt with the sun like ours."

. . . She had planted the rose at home, where it had grown and flourished in a wonderful manner; and every June the great mass of leaves and shoots still broke out into a splendour of scent and crimson colour, as if in its root and fibres there still burnt angrily the passion of that Italian lover.

LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH, *The Rose*

Gather ye Rosebuds

It was not in the Winter
Our loving lot was cast;
It was the time of roses—
We pluck'd them as we pass'd!

That churlish season never frown'd
On early lovers yet:
Oh no—the world was newly crown'd
With flowers when first we met!

'Twas twilight, and I bade you go,
But still you held me fast;
It was the time of roses—
We pluck'd them as we pass'd!

THOMAS HOOD, *Time of Roses*

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REEFCOMBER

I kept wondering what a lovely girl could be doing on that boat

by JOHN KRUSE

SHE had on mirror sun-glasses and a green off-the-shoulder blouse with a bare midriff you could have got one hand round, a pair of high-waisted, skin-tight black slacks, and gold sandals. Her hair was black and as long as a shawl. Her lips were the colour of red peppers, in a drop-pearl face to which the eyes were the key. But the eyes were hidden.

She said: "Uhuh!" There was a trace of panic in her voice.

I had just watched her break up a procession. I was rolling black coffee round my tongue in a tiny bar in the village of Aruwa, South Ceylon, waiting for the sun to climb high enough above the sea for me to go in and spearfish. I could see all there was of Aruwa from where I sat—the thatched stalls bursting with fruit, the bullock-carts, the dust, the flies, and the people—the fierce, gentle little people moving gracefully from stall to stall.

At the head of the village stood a Buddhist temple. The procession had turned out from there and come down along the road slowly. I had watched them come. Their drums shuddered the hot air. The shoppers had turned to watch them, the women still with their baskets on their heads.

It was a shabby, dispirited little affair, and as it drew nearer it began to falter. I couldn't understand why at first; then I saw the girl. She was standing looking at them—and they were looking at her.

First the men who were exploding crackers stopped beating the road with their gunpowder-filled canes. The drums muttered and were silent. The dancers in their silver head-dresses, dancing crabwise to one another, glanced up and came to a standstill, their preoccupied look turning to one of astonishment and interest. The whole of Aruwa was staring at the girl.

"Uhuh!" the girl said. She looked round quickly, saw the bar and came towards it.

I got to my feet, nearly upsetting the table. "Mohammed!" I called to the Madrasee proprietor. Turning to the girl, I said, "Coffee?"

She stopped at the sight of me. Then she came on up to my

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table with a silky movement and a shock-wave of perfume. "Tea."

"*Chae piega*," I called out. "You sure knocked them dead out there."

She sat down swiftly on the edge of a chair with her knees together and her legs sideways. "Are they still staring?"

"They'll go," I said. "They don't get many white people down here. They're just curious." I waved my arm at the procession.

The girl fumbled in a drawstring raffia handbag and drew out a cigarette-case. It had a map of Korea on it. I noticed she wore a wedding-ring.

"Do please sit down. Smoke?" She was trying to act casually.

I told her I didn't smoke. I sat down. I hadn't seen a white woman in two months, but this wasn't just my imagination. Her skin was really like the top off the cream. Her fingers were long and thin and civilized-looking. They shook very slightly as she lit her cigarette. "You're an American," she said.

"Right. Bay St. Louis."

"Brother, those magic words. I haven't seen an American in weeks."

"They don't grow around here, ma'am. Just a few airline pilots up Colombo way. I sort of lone-wolf it around on my own."

She blew a long, thin wafer of smoke over my head. She was trying to establish herself. "Do you really?"

The drums started up again then, and we watched the procession get under way. When they were past she seemed to relax a little. "What was all that about, anyway?"

I shrugged. "Some temple rite." I looked at her. Her face was expressionless. "They were just curious," I said. "I have to admit I'm a little curious myself. Did you fall out of a plane?"

Just for a moment her teeth flashed. "I'm from the yacht."

Of course, the yacht. I had forgotten the small motor yacht lying out beyond the reef. It had been there three or four days. "So you're here on a cruise, Miss—?"

"Er—Smith. Karen Smith." She should have hesitated a bit longer, I thought.

"My name's Mike Gardener. Glad to know you."

Her hand was pliable, a little moist. She took it back and picked up her cigarette with it. She crossed her legs; tilted her head a little. "How brown you are, Mr. Gardener."

She had established herself. Her fingers were steady now. She could deal with any mouse-haired guy like me, in sun-

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bleached khaki shorts and drill shirt—three before breakfast. Her tone annoyed me.

"Why don't you take those blinkers off?" I said.

"What—what do you mean by that?"

"You're too beautiful to be real. Something must be sub-standard somewhere. My guess is it's the eyes."

She stared at me for a moment. She didn't smile. She slowly took off the glasses.

That made her twenty-six, a little on the defensive, a little desperate, and—something I hadn't expected—sad. Her eyes were perfect, dark brown, and long-lidded. "Well?" she said.

"I—I was wrong. I'm sorry."

"Sure you wouldn't like me to pose for you?"

"I said I was sorry."

"I do three poses for a cup of tea. A rum and coke buys me, you know."

"O.K. I had it coming. I apologize."

"Don't apologize. It's true!" She caught her breath. I looked at her quickly. It had sounded like a sob. But she had her glasses on again. Her face was expressionless.

I opened my mouth and shut it again. The tea arrived. I sat there looking away while she clattered the little glass on its saucer. She was punishing herself. I wondered why. This was the hell of a way to pass the time of day.

We ought to have been reminiscing about the good old U.S.A. or something. I plucked up courage and asked her if her husband was ashore with her.

"My husband! What—?" Then she realized I had seen the ring. "My husband's dead."

"Oh, I'm so sorry."

"You're always being sorry, Mr. Gardener."

I didn't say anything. I'm better when I don't say anything.

After a moment, she added in a self-torturing voice: "He was killed in Korea. And if you say you're sorry again, I shall scream.

"He died. I died with him. I was waiting for him in Tokyo, but I died out there in the dirt and the slime with him. What you see here is just the part that's left—the walky-talky part. But it doesn't need your sympathy, Mr. Gardener. It does all right for itself. It does fine."

Her voice had a wavy edge to it like a kris. I tried to think of something to say. But before I could put my foot in it again, a boy in a red sarong came along to our table. He was carrying a big basket of provisions.

The girl looked up. "Ah, Jimmy. Ready?"

He shook his head, which is the Sinhalese way of saying yes.

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She stood up. "Well, Mr. Gardener, thank you for the tea. It's been enchanting."

I got up. "If you're going down to the beach, I'll come with you."

"Don't bother."

"I'm going that way anyway." I paid, collected up my spear-gun and pack, and followed them into the street.

We walked along together between the stalls, without speaking. I wanted to say something that would put it right, but I still couldn't think of anything. Presently the village fell away, and there was loose sand and palm trees and the beach. The sea had a hot, lazy glitter to it. The motor yacht out by the reef looked as if it were set in molasses.

The girl walked slightly ahead of me down to the rowing-boat. She moved, very straight-legged, with her head up and her hair dancing in a fan across her back. The four inches of flesh between her blouse and her waist had a golden plasticity that twisted something inside me like a knife. It was jealousy, I realized with a slight start. I was jealous of the guy out there waiting for her.

I helped the boy get the boat down into the surf. I turned back to the girl. She was on the beach taking off her sandals.

"I guess it's good-bye then," I said.

She faced me and said coldly: "I guess it is."

"Sorry I was so rude."

"There you go again. Being sorry isn't anything, Mr. Gardener. You'll find that out some day. It's what you do."

I walked up to her and stood over her. "Like this?"

I caught her to me and kissed her full on the lips.

Her nails bit into my arms. Her lips were soft and moist, and open with astonishment. Just for an instant she stood there and let me kiss her; then her breath hissed in her nostrils, and she struck me with her closed fist.

"Let go of me, you—" She tore herself away and ran down into the surf.

"Hey!" I called after her. "You'll get yourself wet. Let me carry you." She ignored me, splashing out angrily to the boat.

She reached the boat. She was just about to get in when she staggered. With a horrible scream, she collapsed into the waves.

The boy was on the other side of the dinghy. Before he could get round to her, I had reached her and picked her up out of the water. I swung her into the dinghy and jumped in beside her.

She had both hands clamped round her ankle. Her face was ivory-white. I prized her fingers loose. Just above her ankle-bone there was a red patch which darkened and distended even as

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I looked at it. I stared about me. The ship or the shore? We would need hot water, permanganate, bandages. So far as I knew, there was no doctor in Aruwa.

"Wait!" I called to the gaping cook-boy. I splashed ashore and got my gun and pack. I threw them into the boat and jumped in. "Row like hell!" I told him.

Without a word the boy fitted the oars into the rowlocks and threw his weight on them.

I got the pack open and took out my knife and a box of matches. While I was heating the blade over the flame I looked at the girl. She was writhing, and staring at me with terrified eyes. Her lips moved. "What was it?"

"A sting-ray. Don't ask any questions. Just shut your eyes and hang onto something."

I gripped her leg under my arm and drew the skin tight over her ankle. The inflammation was spreading up her leg as fast as ink on blotting-paper. I knew that if it had been a big ray, she could die. But in water as shallow as that the chances were that it was only a baby.

I hooked the flesh up with the tip of the knife and made an incision. She went rigid and squeaked; then she took it like a soldier. I dropped the knife and squeezed with my thumbs. Out it came, white and thick, like the sap of a milk-plant. There was a lot of it. It turned pink and then red. I let the blood run a little; then soaked her handkerchief in sea-water and tied it round the swelling.

I made her as comfortable as I could in the bottom of the boat.

"How does it feel?"

"Terrible. As if my leg was on fire—all the way up—throbbing. Am I going to die?"

I laughed. "You can't. You're dead already, remember?"

She didn't smile. She looked very sick.

"You'll get sleepy," I told her. "Don't fight it. Just let it come."

She sighed. Her lids were drooping already. I held her hand. She didn't stop me. I don't think she even noticed.

When we got to the yacht she was dozing uneasily. I glanced up. A figure in white was standing at the rail. The cook-boy started yelling in Sinhalese. The people on the yacht had the whole story by the time we came alongside.

There was a lot of native chatter. A wire ladder splashed down into the water beside us. I lifted the girl up off the boards and handed her up. Her head was nodding. It was like holding a sleepy child. The crew caught her under the arms and pulled her carefully up on deck.

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I took hold of the wire ladder. " Stop! " a smooth voice said.

It was the man in white. I looked up at him, and started. He was Sinhalese, tall and well-nourished, with a thin black moustache and cheeks that looked as though he were sucking a couple of boiled sweets.

" Ganga! " I breathed. I had tangled with him once in Colombo. He was a pearl-buyer. English education and all that—a fast, clever thinker with no principles where business was concerned. I had short-circuited him on a deal and in return he had tried to get me deported as a vagrant. He was the last guy I would have wanted to find the girl mixed up with.

" What are you doing here, Gardener? "

" What does it look like? "

" As impertinent as ever, I see. Well, you can let go of that ladder. You're not setting foot aboard my boat." He snapped an order in Sinhalese.

One of the seamen got hold of the ladder and tried to haul it up. I held onto it. " The girl's sick. She's got to be fixed up."

" We can look after her."

" Yeah? Well, I'm coming up just the same." I began to climb.

" I warn you, Gardener, do not set foot—"

I clambered up onto the deck. Ignoring Ganga, I went to the girl. I pushed the seamen out of the way and picked her up in my arms. " Where's her cabin? "

Ganga slid in front of me. His full lips were drawn tight and shiny across his face. His eyes were full of old memories. " Put her down."

" Where's her cabin? "

" Put her down! " It was a whisper.

I turned sideways and pushed past him. There was a companion-way leading below decks. I ducked through the doorway with the girl and squeezed down the narrow steps.

" Gardener! " The word scraped behind me like a skid-stop on ice. Maybe he had a gun, I didn't know. I didn't care, right then. I manœuvred into a passageway. There were four doors. One of them was ajar on its hook. I kicked the hook up and looked in. There were make-up things on the dressing-table and black pyjamas laid out on the bed. I had hit lucky.

I stepped over the door-frame and laid the girl gently down on the bed. Her head swung over on the pillow. Her eyelids fluttered. She groaned. I felt her forehead. It was burning.

I heard a movement behind me and swung round. Ganga was in the passage, standing back to let someone by. " Get him! " I heard him say in Sinhalese.

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I slammed the door in the man's face and snapped home the bolt. Someone beat on the panels. I propped a chair under the handle and kicked the legs in tight. The girl had to be fixed up and nobody but myself was going to touch her. I hoped to heaven there was water in there.

There was. The wash-basin was in a tiny cupboard. I turned on the hot tap and let it run while I looked around for something that would do for a bandage. All I could find were handkerchiefs, but they were too dainty. I tore up the face towel longways. There was some peroxide. I took that.

I worked on the girl's leg for about ten minutes. I drained it again; bathed it. She kicked a little, groaning in her sleep. The door shuddered all the time as though people were shouldering it. A good deal of shouting went on outside. I worked as fast as I could.

When I had put the bandage on, I eased the girl into the bed and tucked her up. She lay there peacefully, her black hair bunched up around her face, emphasizing her pallor. Her lips were parted—a little smeared where I had kissed them—her eyelids blue-grey and shiny. She was all cream and jet, like the reef-waters at night.

I touched her cheek. " Good luck," I whispered.

I pulled the chair away and opened the door. The noise stopped like a broken sound-track. The passage seemed to be jammed full of men. There was Ganga, a big Indian with a curry-paunch and a captain's cap, and three Tamil seamen. They all stared at me.

I closed the door and pushed through them. One of the seamen grabbed at me half-heartedly. I shook him off and walked up the passage. The door of the end cabin was ajar. Someone was watching through the crack. As I approached, the crack snapped shut. It was too dark to see who it was—even if I had wanted to.

I went straight up on deck. At the rail I turned. Ganga was first up the companion-way. He was one of those people who tremble when they're angry. He stood out into the sunlight now and trembled, his eyes flat and deadly in his soft-butter face.

" The kid's sleeping," I told him. " Don't wake her. I don't know who she is or what she is to you, but if you give a damn about her you'll up-anchor and make for Galle; get her to a quack."

I turned and swung down the ladder into the dinghy. " If you want your boat back, you'd better send the boy."

Ganga came to the rail and glared down at me. The Captain came up beside him, then the seamen. None of them spoke. I

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tried to read what was going on in Ganga's westernized oriental mind, but it was like trying to read a gila.

One thing I saw, though, and knowing Ganga it surprised me. Fear.

He said something to the Captain. The Captain shouted and the boy answered from somewhere. Ganga twisted away from the rail and disappeared. A few moments later, the boy climbed down into the boat and we pulled away.

I didn't spear many fish that day. My mind was too full. I wallowed around the eastern end of the reef all afternoon, whanging with the gun and blunting the harpoon. The place was stacked with big red parrot-fish, drifting flank to flank, chipping off the coral with their beaks. But I don't take parrots: they fetch next to nothing in the market. I drifted in amongst them, almost touching them, waiting for kingfish. It was like being lost in the sunset.

I kept wondering what a lovely girl like Karen was doing on that boat with Ganga. And why had Ganga looked scared?

My mind went round and round in a sort of day-dream, asking questions and getting no answers. The tide heaved us in and out, sucking through the boilers of the reef, coughing and choking. The parrots crunched the coral audibly, like children eating butterscotch. Who had it been, peeping through that door?

I stuck my head up from time to time to see if the boat had put to sea. But it didn't move. Maybe the girl had recovered, I thought. Maybe Ganga didn't care if she did or not. The thought of her alone with him made me feel sick. I planed down the wall of the reef and tried to take it out on a thirty-pound yellow-spot grouper. But I had so blunted the harpoon that the arrow bounced off his head. Old merou rolled his stuffed-toy eyes at me and back-paddled into his hole and I hadn't the will or the enthusiasm to wrestle him out.

By evening I had speared one miserable five-pound horse-mackerel which I sold to a strawberry-nosed planter at the market price of one rupee fifty a pound. His wife gave me two eggs. With these and the equivalent of one buck to show for a day's work, I dragged back to the beach and set up camp.

The sun drowned in a blood-bath to the west and for a while the world seemed to be on fire. I sat out there in the sharpening air and smelt things and ate my two eggs and a hand of bananas and drank the milk of a king coconut.

A purple heron winged home overhead, the air sighing through its feathers, and I thought of home and of the girl and, for the first time in my life, I felt lonely.

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I got up and wandered along the shore. The lights were on in the yacht. It hadn't moved. I wondered what was going on out there. I wondered for an hour, maybe two. Then, suddenly, I had to know.

I changed back into my wet trunks, strapped on a knife, put on fins and a mask, and flapped down into the sea.

The water was warm and friendly. The surf felt like silk against me as I beat out through it; then it felt like nothing and I was in deep water, swimming slowly without splashing and looking down into the speckled blackness through the mask in case I should run into shark. At night in these waters big fish set up a phosphorescent disturbance which is easy to see.

There was plenty of movement down there, like the night-sky gone crazy, but if there was anything big, I didn't see it. As I drew near the ship, music came to me, first clear, then muted by the waves. It was Indian music. A radio was playing softly on the after-deck under the awning. I heard a cough. Someone was sitting out there in the darkness, listening to it.

I came in under the bows. The sea was very still and I took my time so as not to raise a splash. I could hear the high natter of Tamil voices in the forepeak. I pushed the mask up and worked my way aft on the port side, holding onto the shelf which ran along the hull a foot or so above the water-line. The girl's cabin was on the starboard side, but before I tried to see her there was something I was curious about.

I stopped amidships. Five feet above my head was a row of portholes. The one directly above me was open. Luminosity showed through it. I lay back in the water, judging my distance. If my reckoning was right, this was the cabin someone had peeped out of that morning. I bobbed up and down a couple of times, then, using the shelf as a lever, I sprang up out of the water and reached for the porthole.

I just caught the lip of it with the tips of my fingers. I made good my hold with the other hand; hung there for a moment, listening to the water drain off me. To my keyed-up senses it sounded as if someone had opened up a sluice-gate. I looked up at the deck. The rail above me swung, deserted, against the stars. By bending the fins up I managed to get a foothold on the shelf. I drew myself up very cautiously and looked in.

Within six feet of me sat an Indian. Why he didn't hear me, I'll never know, unless perhaps it was because he was deep in concentration. He had two pairs of glasses on his beaked nose and he was working at a table under a shaded lamp.

Wasted, clerkish, with pitted cheeks. I knew him at once. Ganga's pearl-doctor and jewel-setter—Batliwallah.

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The table in front of him was littered with the tools of his trade. He was working on a brooch-setting, bending back the little claws with a pair of tiny pliers.

There were no stones in the brooch. Scattered over the table were other settings—also without stones.

I suppose I watched him for ten seconds. Then I slid back into the sea, letting myself go right under to lessen the noise.

Batliwallah, I thought. What was he doing on Ganga's private yacht? Routine work, it looked like; but it didn't make sense. Ganga wasn't the sort of guy to give free vacations to his staff. The idea passed through my mind—pearls. But the nearest pearling-grounds were the government fisheries a good thirty miles to the east.

A door opened on laughter somewhere. Bare feet padded across the deck. I squeezed in against the hull and held my breath. Someone giggled through his nostrils just above me, and a bucket of scraps hit the water. The feet padded away again and there was fresh laughter, amputated by the slam of the door.

Mystified by my discovery, I worked my way round the starboard side. Karen's cabin was aft. That made it dangerous. Her light was on and both her portholes were open. I lay in the water and listened.

From the deck above, the eerie cadence of a woman singing *Tumhi nahin muchko praem sikaya* shivered the night air. I waited until she was joined by the jangly accompaniment, then sprang upwards.

The porthole was too small for me to get my head in. I could see only the bottom of the bed. There were feet in the bed. I took a chance and hissed: "Karen!"

The feet stirred—jumped would be a better word. I heard the rustle of someone drawing up in bed and then silence. Listening silence.

"It's Mike," I whispered.

The bed creaked and Karen came hopping into view. She had on the black pyjamas. They caught the light as she moved so that she looked as if her body glistened. Her eyes flared wide when she saw me.

"Mr. Gardener!" She came close to the porthole. She had no lipstick on. She looked like a different person, like a little girl. "What are you doing here?"

"I was worried. I had to see you. How's the leg?"

"The pain's gone. I slept all afternoon."

"No throbbing?"

"No."

"You're O.K. Better take it easy for a day or two, though."

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"Yes, Doc." She smiled with her eyes; hesitated. "Was it —was it you who put me to bed?"

"Yes."

"I thought it was. Thank you—Mike." She touched my fingers. "You don't know how glad I am."

My feet were slipping. I was in a damned uncomfortable position. I was shivering. I wasn't just cold. I could smell the perfume on her. Her breath was on my lips.

"Listen—I can't hang on much longer. I've got to know—you and Ganga. You realize he's a crook? I've got to know what's going on."

She drew away from me a little. "I can take care of myself, if that's what you're worrying about."

A chair scraped overhead. I ducked down out of the light and hugged the side, looking up. A figure came to the rail. He was only a few feet from me. I hung there, watching the angle of his head. If he looked down, he would see me.

A cigarette glowed and died against his face. Suddenly he made a smooth movement. The red tip whirled away into the darkness. It was Ganga, all right. The next moment he was gone and I was left staring up at the Southern Cross with numbness spreading through my fingers.

I drew myself up to the porthole again. "Listen," I whispered, "there's something screwy going on aboard this boat. I don't know what it is and I don't much care. But I'm telling you in case you don't know and get mixed up in it."

The girl folded her arms and depressed her shoulders. "Well, you can forget about it. It's none of your business, Mike. Keep out of it."

"But—"

"No buts." The little-girl lips hardened. "Just stick to your own angles and let other people take care of theirs."

Someone had turned the radio up loud. I had to raise my voice. "You little fool! You're playing with dynamite. Your friend Ganga's booked for a hard bed and brick wallpaper. It's been coming to him for a long time. If you're not careful, you'll wind up in there with him."

"You'd better beat it, Mike. You're wasting your time."

I bared my teeth. I wanted to get hold of her, shake some sense into her. "You can do better than this! Holy smoke, girl, you could get a job anywhere with what you've got—"

"Listen, Mike. When things don't matter to you, you don't care about the nice jobs. You angle for the jobs that pay off. When Hal died, I took an offer to model gowns for a Jap textile firm. Legitimate. And what happened? They sent me

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on tour with the sales manager; we got to Colombo, and he ditched me because I wouldn't sign the hotel register as Mrs. Yosh. Stranded me without a cent. Legitimate! I'll take the other. You know what to expect that way."

"But don't you see—?"

The radio was blaring so loud now I could hardly hear myself speak. A sudden sense of danger came to me. I looked up.

There were two shapes at the rail. They were leaning right out over me. At the precise moment I moved, the butt of a pole came down and hit me between the eyes.

A thunderflash seemed to go off in my brain. The next moment I was in the water, floundering about like a winged duck. The only thing I could think of was that I mustn't drown.

I splashed about among the bursting stars, taking in water and choking.

If there was any activity or shouting up on deck, I didn't hear it. The first positive thing I remember is someone grabbing me. A rope was passed under my arms. It seemed to tighten unbearably and I felt myself hauled up on deck. After that there was a blank.

I came to in a raging temper with myself. I was lying on my side with my hands lashed behind me to what was probably a stanchion. My frontal bone felt as if a tree were trying to grow up out of it. I lay there, hating myself, and listening to a nice little voice with corners on it defending itself against a voice smooth as a dynamo.

"I tell you, I told him nothing! He simply came out here to see how I was."

"Ye-es? Unfortunately, I can't believe you. If it were true, I wouldn't believe you. I couldn't afford to, my dear Karen. If one word of what we're doing leaks out, this trip—all our future trips will be ruined."

"But talk sense, Paul. You can't keep him prisoner indefinitely."

"No, I can't."

"Then—" There was a moment of silence. "No! You couldn't!"

"Now, don't jump to conclusions."

"No, Paul. No! If you touch him, I swear I'll have the law on you so fast—"

"Shut up!" It was like a whiplash. "You're overstepping yourself, aren't you? Who brought him here in the first place? You went ashore this morning against my express wishes. Now we're saddled with your pick-up and you're giving me orders.

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Just hold your tongue. I intend to keep him here until Olaf comes. Then the four of us will have a conference and decide on the most intelligent thing to do. In the meantime I think you had better go to your cabin."

I heard Karen gasp. There was a sudden hobbling sound and I felt her kneel down beside me; smelt her perfume. I sensed her looking at me for a moment. Then, very gently, one finger traced the swelling above my nose. The finger vibrated as though she were shivering. I played possum.

"Poor devil!" Karen said. "What did you hit him with?"

"Never mind that. Get below," Ganga ordered coldly, adding in Sinhalese: "Women! Will we never learn our lesson? Send the men back to their quarters, Nwab."

"What about *him*?" I guessed it was the Captain's voice.

"I'll be here. I slept this afternoon. I'm going to wait up for Olaf."

The Captain shouted some orders. Naked feet pattered away up the deck. Karen's hand stroked my cheek, cupped itself over my mouth for an instant. I kissed it. She drew in her breath, but didn't say anything.

Then she was gone from me, and I was left thinking, Olaf! So it *was* pearls. Olaf Peterson was a veteran pearler. I had done a season's skin-diving for his outfit a few years back, near Adam's Bridge. Just one season—that was why I was still alive. He worked his divers till they could wipe their noses on their feet. "Bender" Peterson, they called him—the "bends" being diver's paralysis. They curl a chap up. If he was going to sit in on a conference to decide my fate, I thought, I might as well stop breathing now.

The ship became kind of quiet. I opened one eye. I was lying on the after-deck. Ganga was sitting in a deck-chair about fifteen feet away, reading in the light of a frilly table-lamp. There was a tray of drinks at his elbow. I wiggled my toes. I still had the fins on. My ankles weren't tied. My mask lay on the deck close to my head. I was lying on the knife-sheath and I could feel it was empty.

I tested my wrists. The ropes were tight and wet. That meant they would shrink still further. I started in to stretch them while I could, scissoring my arms behind me.

At the end of an hour, if anything, the ropes were tighter. My arms and shoulders ached. My head ached. Ganga read on, ignoring me. The night wore on. I began to get cold and very worried. By the stars it was about two o'clock when I heard a faint vibration in the air.

Ganga heard it, too. He sat up and looked at his watch. He

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seemed puzzled. He stepped over to the rail and stood peering out into the darkness.

It was a boat, all right, and it was coming fast. Ganga turned suddenly and stamped a couple of times. "Nwab Singh!" he called out.

A few moments later the Captain hoisted his paunch up on deck. He had all his buttons undone. He was half asleep.

"It's Olaf!" Ganga said. "He's two hours ahead of schedule. Something's wrong. Stand by to get under way."

The Captain's eyes bulged. He started to shout, trotting off towards the bridge. Inside a minute the whole boat was alive. I twisted the ropes hard. If Olaf was coming, I was going. Where was Karen?

On the movies this would be the time when someone cut you free. But that was the movies.

When Karen finally came hopping on deck in her dressing-gown, she went straight to the rail.

Olaf's boat came snarling out of the darkness with its lights out. I heard the engines change as he threw her into full-astern, heard the water boil up under her quarter. Then her anchor-davit nosed up out of the darkness, followed by her foremast. The heads and shoulders of the men aboard her, wool-capped, bearded, slid by the rails—tense, hard faces. I picked out the diver right away.

He was a Jap. Heck, but he was twisted. A little old guy of twenty.

There was a bump. Then hairy hands grasped the rail and Olaf swung up on deck. He reached back for a leather bag with a big padlock on it; swung round, blinking, into the light of the pretty table-lamp.

Short, dark, a yard wide, with eyebrows you could wipe your feet on—he thrust the bag and a key into Ganga's hand.

"Ve're on the run! Gotta keep going. Forty-eight pearls in there. See you in Colombo!" He turned and started back over the rail.

"Hey, wait a minute!" Ganga yelled. "Who's after you? How far behind?"

"Fisheries patrol. They tumble us ven ve are packing up. Ve got a five-knot lead on them. Guess maybe they're half an hour in back. You vant to get moving." He balanced for a moment and jumped back onto his own boat.

"Not so fast!" Ganga snapped. "We've got an old friend of yours here. Gardener. I want you—"

"Can't vait!" Olaf shouted.

He throttled up deafeningly. I felt the water kick up under

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our keel as his screws got a grip. The battered cabin-cruiser slid away into the darkness, leaving us rolling in its wake.

"Blast!" Ganga said. He turned to Nwab Singh; said in Sinhalese: "Kill all lights. Get under way. Quickly."

"Where to?"

"Sea. Clear of the territorial limit. Then heave to and wait for orders."

The Captain hurried off. Ganga turned to Batliwallah. "Forty-eight pearls. How long will it take to set them?"

The Indian shrugged. "First I must see them."

"I'll come with you." Ganga led the way towards the companion-way. He suddenly remembered Karen and stopped. "Oh no, my dear. You can't stay here. Come on. Down." He went back to her and took her by the arm; said over his shoulder to me: "You, Gardener, better start saying your prayers."

Karen went white. She snatched her arm away. "What are you going to do to him?"

"What do you think? We can't take him into port with us now, that's certain. Come on."

Karen put up a fight, but Ganga twisted her arm behind her back. She screamed. I fought with the ropes while the two of them dragged her below.

The table-lamp died, leaving me in darkness. The engines started up. I was really scared now. I squirmed about on deck, dragging at my hands, while the boat swung out to sea and gathered speed.

It just couldn't be done. The ropes had set like iron. After about ten minutes, I was exhausted. I lay there sweating, with the breeze of our movement chilling across my skin. Presently the engines began to slow. Idled. We drifted through the sea with the water lapping against our sides. We were outside the limit already. A frustrated, icy despair gripped me.

Ganga's magnolia-white suit came up onto the darkened deck. He stood for a moment in thought; then went forward. He came back, bringing the Captain and three seamen with him. They stood over me and I sensed their uneasiness. "Fetch me the anchor from the dinghy," Ganga said.

One of the men went off. Ganga took a length of line from Nwab Singh and tested it. "Trail it overboard for a minute. Soak it. It will knot better."

The line was dropped over the rail. Ganga strolled away, scuffing his feet. He paused to light a cigarette. His hand was shaking. Nobody said anything.

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The first man came back with the anchor. The line was hauled in, then cut, and six feet of it tied to the anchor.

"How about these things?" Nwab Singh asked, kicking my fins.

"Leave them on. Put his mask on, too. Round his neck, so it doesn't come off. If he ever floats up again, it'll look as if he was out taking a swim and got swept out to sea. May as well cover all eventualities."

"You sweet little bastard!" I said.

"Thank you, Gardener. I think I can afford to ignore that. Now tie the other end of the line to his ankle."

One of the seamen reached for my leg. I kicked him halfway across the deck. The other two threw themselves across my knees. I struggled, but I couldn't get any purchase, lying on one hip.

They fixed the line to my right ankle, making a big show over the knots, hauling and grunting. Then they cut me loose from the stanchion and jerked me to my feet. My wrists were still tied, but my legs were free. I kneed one of the seamen in the groin, shook the others off. The Captain made a grab at me. I butted him in the chins and made a run for the companion-way.

I don't know whether it was my fins or the anchor-line which tripped me. I fell flat on my face. The next moment they were all on top of me. I was lifted bodily and carried to the rail, bundled over the rail and held there while one of them fetched the anchor.

I was in a panic. I twisted my legs round the metal struts, trying to throw my weight back. I was yelling, but I don't know what I said.

I felt the rope being cut away from my wrists. At the same instant as my hands came free I was given a push. I reached back at the rail. My fingers touched it, clutched, slipped. For a moment I was hanging by my legs. Then the anchor jerked me loose. I caught a glimpse of inky waters, snatched in some air, and hit the surface.

The mask smacked me in the mouth. I turned over and went down like a sounding-lead. A delayed-action scream registered in my brain: "Mike! *Mike!*" It might have been Karen, watching from her porthole. My mind was a pandemonium of impressions, of lights and fires and stark horror. I jerked and twisted and kicked, but the pressure built up around me unchecked.

I would exhaust myself. *Think!* My hand flew to my belt. No knife. Something sharp. My teeth. I reached down and

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pulled up the cord; wrenched at it with my teeth. Not in a month. I clawed the knot with my nails. It was solid, like a piece of reefing.

The water burst up into my sinuses like liquid fire. I all but gasped out my air. For a moment I could think of nothing but the pain. Then I thought through it. *The knot.* I couldn't even find the tag-end of it. I found it, traced it to the first loop. Time —there was no time.

Then it was my ears. A sick ache started up behind them; spread round to the back of my neck; bore in. My drums were bursting. It would be like an explosion—then silence, with the water making no sound as it rushed in. I was digging at the knot, but the rope had swollen already, each strand enveloping the other.

My tortured fingers began to lose their feeling. I fought with the knot until I could feel nothing at all, bracing myself against the agony of burst drums that I knew must come. But it didn't come. For an instant I couldn't understand what had happened. Then it came through to me. Bottom! The anchor had sounded. Judging by the pressure, I was about forty feet down. A reef, maybe. Coral. Razor-edged coral!

I dragged myself down what seemed like a mile of line; found the anchor; groped about under the anchor. My hands encountered a smooth and slimy surface. Something seemed to shrivel up inside me with horror; but I kept on over it. I didn't care what it was. Then I did care. It was rock. Rounded, weed-covered rock. Not a cutting-edge anywhere.

I let go. Drifted—my body starving for air. I was through. Finally through. Things passed through my mind—I don't know what they were. They came and went so fast it was like madness. My imagination twisted and tore at the cord. I thought of breaking my ankle, biting through the flesh. Blades flashed across my inner eye, every kind of blade—knives, saws, axes, chisels, razors.

Suddenly I tore the mask from my neck; broke the glass over my knee. I wrenched the splintered glass from the rubber and grabbed up the line.

Hauling it tight, I began to saw. I cut with a downward movement, insensible to the lacerations of the jagged glass.

My air was all used up. Something inside me was winding back like a catapult. When it broke, it would be the end. I scrubbed and sawed and scraped, groaning at the back of my throat with the strain of the pressure. There was a jerk. The rope went limp in my hand. I was free. *Free!*

But now which way to the surface? I didn't know—didn't

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know which way up I was. Supposing I swam down? I kicked frantically, clutching the water and pulling it down past me. There was no sensation of moving. Was I going up or down? A lessening or increasing of the pressure? I couldn't tell. My senses were no longer functioning. I couldn't last out another second.

But I did. Two seconds. Three. Three years. Still I was struggling. Why then no sensation of movement? Had it been an illusion? Was I still, in fact, anchored to the bottom?

I hit the surface like a sailfish; fell back into the water; dragging in air. The sky was scarlet to my eyes. There was sickness in every part of me. I clutched my ears and floated, the breath sawing in my throat—whistling in my throat. Air! Wonderful, glorious air!

Everything seemed to fog over. I couldn't let go now. Not now. I hung onto consciousness with everything I had left—and it wasn't much. Slowly things sorted themselves out. The water rushed out of my sinuses in a choking flood. I saw the boat. She was head-on to me. I had come up in front of her bows. The sound of her engine shuddered the air. I didn't know if anyone had seen me. I didn't care. I was past caring about anything. I just lay back and breathed.

When I opened my eyes again, the yacht was moving. She nosed slowly towards me, turning a little. I saw a dark blob against her side. It was one of the fenders they had thrown out when Olaf had come alongside. I struck out feebly towards it. It swung past with deceptive speed. I made a panicky effort and grabbed at its rope mesh and hung on. I felt myself dragged through the water.

Somehow I clawed myself up onto it. It was about the size of a sack of potatoes and I sat on top of it, riding it, with my arms thrown round the rope and my face against the side of the boat. In that position I passed out.

How long I hung there unconscious, I don't know. For five or ten minutes is my guess. When I opened my eyes I couldn't think where I was. The sea rushed by dizzily beneath me. My head felt as if there was someone in there trying to fight his way out. Then I remembered. I made an effort and kicked off my fins. The severed rope-end still trailed from my ankle. I knotted it around my leg.

Three minutes later I was on deck—flat on deck. For a while I hadn't the strength to move. Luckily, no one came along. The way I finally got to my feet was pure farce. The ship was in darkness. I was slightly aft of the bridge. I blinked up at the open door of the wheelhouse. Nwab Singh would be in there at the wheel, I guessed. The crew all seemed to be below.

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I stumbled around, looking for a weapon. I found a boat-hook in the dinghy. I could just manage to lift it.

Holding the boat-hook reversed like a battering-ram, I edged to the bridge companion-way; crawled up the steps one at a time. From halfway up I could see the Captain.

He was outlined against the far window, the underside of his shiny fat face lit up by the control panel. He was turned three-quarters away from me.

I levelled the blunt end of the pole, got to my feet, and charged him. It was a shaky charge, but the pole caught him smack behind the left ear. His head thumped against the window-frame and he tumbled to the floor like a fat boy on a football field.

I stepped over him and looked out of the window. There was no one on the foredeck. The bows knifed through the still sea. Heck, she looked big to handle. I wondered if I knew enough to do what I was planning.

The telegraph lever was set at half ahead. I steadied the wheel and looked at the compass. We were headed west. Very, very slowly I began to ease the wheel to starboard, watching the needle.

No one came screaming up the ladder at me. No one noticed. I guessed Ganga was below, gloating over his pearls. When the needle trued up over north, I eased her up and held her steady.

The Captain started to groan. I let go the wheel and frisked him for a gun. He hadn't got one. So I hit him with the first heavy thing I could lay my hands on—a pair of binoculars. He grunted.

I took the wheel again and peered ahead for some sign of land. I was putting her in to shore. I aimed to run Ganga's little craft clean up the beach into someone's front garden.

I felt rather than heard a bump.

It came up through the woodwork, as though someone had tripped coming up the companion-way. Without turning my head, I looked out of the corner of my eye.

Someone was creeping up the steps.

As casually as I could, I fixed the wheel and moved back out of view of the doorway; heel-toed it to the door and stood behind it. I waited maybe a minute. There wasn't a sound anywhere. Then slowly, very slowly, a big black Luger came probing round the door, followed by an arm.

I brought my knuckles down with a crack on the wrist behind the gun. The Luger clattered to the floor. There was a yelp. My fingers found a throat. A slim, soft throat.

"Karen!"

"Mike!"

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I caught her up in a hug, swung her round. She clung to me, gasping. "Mike! I thought—I saw you—It can't be true!"

"It very nearly wasn't."

"But—I don't understand. What happened? Oh Mike, I'm so glad!" She was half laughing, half crying.

"I'll tell you about it later. How did you get out? Where's Ganga?"

"I locked him in with Batliwallah. I don't think he knows it yet. I picked the lock of my cabin with a pair of scissors. Then I locked them in and went to Ganga's cabin. I went through his things till I found the gun. I was going to hold Nwab Singh up and force him to put in to shore."

"Good kid!" I let go of her and went back to the wheel. "What were they doing down there?"

"Setting the pearls. The pearls I was supposed to wear. Brooches, a ring, maybe a necklace. It all depended on how many there were. There were to have been dozens of trips. On each trip I was to have carried the same jewellery, passing out through the Customs with fake pearls in the settings and coming back with the real thing. But let's forget about all that. Gosh, it's great to see you. I'm sorry I nearly shot you."

I grinned. "Being sorry isn't anything," I said. "It's what you do."

Karen stood quite still in the darkness. Then slowly she came up to me. Her fingers touched my shoulder. She stood on tip-toe. "Like this?" She kissed me.

I didn't tear myself away.

A moment later she dragged her lips from mine. "Look out!"

I turned in time to see the navigation lights of a long, low vessel loom up ahead. I swung the wheel hard over, telegraphed full astern in the same movement.

"It's the patrol boat!" I shouted. "The one that was after Olaf. Quick, find the lights. Turn on all the lights! Yell at them! Tell them we're coming alongside."

★ ★ ★

A CATCH IN IT!

In recent years impaling acts, in their pure form, have had some rough going. For night-club bookings an agent's attitude is likely to be, "All right, ya throw knives. But whadda ya do for an *act*?" The result is that today the performer is likely to double in stock-whip and rope spinning. And the agent, taking his cigar from his mouth and missing the ashtray with the ashes, will growl, "O.K., O.K. Can ya sing?"

WILLIAM L. GRESHAM, *Monster Midway*

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THE YOUNG WIND

**His kite swept down
to touch the far blue hills**

by EDITH MACWHIRTER

"I SAW the wind this morning," said the boy, pursing his fingers to lift a mouthful of rice from the bowl.

"You never see the wind," his father answered. "Eat your food and be off to your work."

"I saw it," the boy insisted, "out there on the maidan when I took the cattle. Alone it was—high up and laughing. It likes to play."

"Who doesn't," asked his father, "when there's work to be done? Come, now, where's your broom? There's the seven-o'clock gong—you should be at the bungalow. Already I have finished the office floors. Hurry, now, hurry. The sahib will be sharp if you're late again, and we shan't get the tin roof he promised before the rains. Come, now, come."

He reached down to the boy's ear, twitched him abruptly to his feet, thrust the soft broom below his arm, and lifted a hand to cuff him. The boy dodged, eel-like, and was gone through the door gap in the thatched wall out into the cool, sparkling morning.

"Saw the wind, indeed!" his father shouted after him.

"I saw it," called the boy as he ran through shadow and sunshine down the path between the dewy green tea bushes. "I saw it—high up and laughing."

And the wind touched him on the shoulder—a gleeful, conspiratorial touch through his faded pink shirt. It seized his words and raced off with them, it tossed them to and fro between white, fluffy clouds, far above the great blue hills rimming the horizon, then it brought them close again and puffed them through the dried branches of the shade trees, so that last year's leaves fell and whirled in a gay brown confetti about him.

"High up and laughing," he called out with the echo; and he picked up a stone from the path and threw it playfully to the wind. But the stone came curving sharply down and he knew disappointment. Who would want to play with a dull, ordinary stone?

If he had a coloured kite now, like the one he'd once seen a

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visiting sahib's baba playing with, up there at the bungalow, then he'd toss it to the wind and watch it bounced about the sky —he and the wind playing kite; both of them laughing and tussling together.

He leapt the nullah behind the bungalow, ignoring the bamboo bridge. Bridges were for the old ones, for the stumbling and the blind, not for boys. There was the dark splodge of the litchi trees, and the purple glare of the bougainvillaea hedge, and the white face of the bungalow with all its eyes of windows—and inside, all the day's floors, waiting for sweeping and polishing. And he was like the wind, young, and by himself, and he liked to play.

He looked up to the wind, and waved his pale, soft broom at it, as he'd seen the sahibs waving to each other when they parted —untidy arms flapping out of their gleaming motor-cars—no doubt, it brought them luck and pleased their gods.

"Wind," he shouted, "you wind, up there!" And the wind mocked him with his inadequate words and rushed down and seized the broom from him, and tossed it—a golden, sunlit feather—high over the hedge into the vegetable garden, making him laugh and chase after it.

"Wait, wind," he shouted, "until the noonday gong. Wind —wait, wind—"

"Come out of there, you young devil. What d'you mean by throwing your low-class broom at the sahib's cabbages? Is it not enough that again you are half an hour late? Must I wait here all day on this freezing back verandah?"

The bearer was glaring down at him. Small he was, and grizzled like a forest monkey—a forest monkey with a half-smoked biri in its lips—a monkey which slapped a white pugaree on its head and flicked up a duster as the boy skipped up the steps.

"It was the wind," said the boy.

"I'll give you wind," the bearer muttered, as together they entered the house.

Floors and carpets and dishevelled cold-weather fireplaces; wastepaper-baskets and coal-buckets and kitchen garbage-cans; and the sand-box wet from the cat; dustpans and furniture polish, and the red stone floor cold to hands and shuffling knees; and outside, the wind waiting and playing by itself in the shade trees.

Once it came calling after him, mocking down the chimney at him, "Bo—oy, bo—oy," so that all last night's ashy dust came billowing up into his face, making him choke and sneeze; and

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the bearer rated him for intentionally soiling the carpet and the chair-covers.

The voice of the memsahib from the doorway said, " Boy, do as the bearer tells you, and take more care."

Her voice stayed quiet when she spoke to him; and usually he gave no reply. His father said it was disrespectful to look up or to answer. But this morning everything was changed for him because he'd seen the young wind. He stopped shovelling the ash into the dustpan, and turned, and looked across his shoulder at her.

She was carrying her flower-basket, and snipping at the air with her scissors. Gaunt-boned she was—pink and sparse-haired like his father's old buffalo.

" It was the wind," he told her.

" Ah," she said, and her pale eyes flickered; and when she stepped out into the garden, he saw that she looked up.

Later in the morning, he found the scarlet paper inside a cardboard box she gave him to throw away. Red as hibiscus flowers it was, and smooth and clear as glass. He took it with him to the back verandah.

" What new devilment? " asked the bearer, busy with his master's shoes. The boy grinned at the grumpy monkey-face, and shook the paper out. Immediately the wind came tearing down, snatching at the colour in his hands.

" Careful, wind, careful," he cried in a high, important voice, " wait, now, and I'll make you a kite."

" Careful, wind," mimicked the bearer in a squeaky, mocking voice. " Who is Sitaram, the sweeper boy, to chide the wind? And what does a jungli like you know of the making of kites? Now, when I was a boy in the city where my father had his house . . ."

But the boy only laughed at the thought of the kite; and the wind tore at the morning's dusters stretched out to dry.

" Two sticks," said the bearer, " and you cross them so." He laid one shabby, shiny brogue diagonally across the other.

" Those are shoes," said the boy.

" Owl," said the bearer. " Two sticks, I said, and you cross them so. There was a man my father knew—sometimes we visited his shop and watched him make the kites he sold us, and then we would go up with him afterwards to the roof, and fly our kites with all the others high above the great white buildings—a million kites in the proud city sky. And you, a jungli boy, presume to tell me about kites. Two sticks, measuring so—"

The bearer got to his feet and went loping down the back steps calling, " Mali, mali! "

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The boy put the paper away. "Wait, wind," he called, "for the noonday gong, and you shall have a kite."

He filled the cat's box with fresh sand and took it indoors again, and fetched his cloth and tin and finished polishing the bathroom floor. Up and down on all fours he went, his back shuffling rhythmically to and fro, his reflection slowly gleaming out at him from the wax-smeared surface—the same solitary pattern over and over again. And all the time the wind beseeching, and impatient for its kite.

And how was he to make it, the kite he'd promised? He'd only seen a kite once. A piece of coloured paper tied to string. You tossed it and it danced up the sky.

"Ki—ite," begged the wind through the bathroom window, "my ki—ite." And it slapped the curtains to and fro across his head, and caught the curl of white paper hanging at the wall, billowing it out, unfurling it, and tossing it like a garland round the boy's thin neck.

"You wind," laughed the boy, rolling the paper back again. Two sticks, the bearer had said, and you crossed them so—

There were the sticks on the back-verandah floor, pale and straight and smoothed, and tied firmly to each other; and there was the sahib's glue-pot, and a large twist of string, and the peremptory voice of the bearer.

"Come, boy, where's that paper? See, the two sticks, as I said. Thus they were made in the shop of my father's friend. And the string—the mali says you may borrow the bean string—borrow, mind. So now the paper."

The boy took out the rustling scarlet sheet, and watched the bearer fold it and lay it below the bamboo cross. "Scissors," he muttered to the boy, "we need her scissors. You hold the paper until I come."

"See, wind," said the boy, holding the paper in his thin brown hands, "see, your kite."

And the wind whooped its pleasure, and clowned about, and blew into the sahib's socks pegged out on the line, making them dance with fat, airy feet. The boy forgot and clapped his hands in delight, and at once the scarlet paper tried to fly; but the bamboo cross held it firm. And there were the bare feet padding back through the house, with sandalled feet clicking after.

She had brought the scissors herself to see what it was they wanted to cut.

"Here and here," said the bearer.

"This way," she said, lifting the bright paper, "you fold it so and so—"

"Enough to turn," said the bearer, stirring the glue.

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"And the tail?" she asked, slicing with the shining scissors.

"Here at this corner—" The bearer's respectful finger was as leathery and polished as the brown brogues he had been cleaning.

"Cut from the paper?" The scissors hesitated.

"This way," the shiny finger sketched a curving outline.

"We used to make them differently," she said. "A long string, and little twists knotted all along it."

"This is the Indian custom. Always when I was a boy in the city, visiting at the shop of my father's friend . . ."

The wind grew bored and stopped playing with the socks. "My ki—ite," it moaned reproachfully at the boy. "Come, my ki—ite."

The boy saw the shadows, short and deep across the grass, lying in the shape of noon. Any minute now there'd be the gong —and he'd promised the kite for the noonday gong.

He looked anxiously at the scarlet paper. They had it in their hands—the pink and the shiny brown muddling together, and the scarlet kite growing firm and square.

"Hurry, hurry," the boy cried impatiently, "it is the wind."

"Hush," the bearer hissed, glaring round at him with scandalized eyes. But the pink hands went calmly on, tying firm knots in the rough string.

"With kites," her voice said, "it is always the wind. There!" She held her handiwork out at arm's length, looking at it, her head lolling a little to one side.

It was done. The scarlet paper was a kite. He stretched out his hand.

"Not so fast. Not so fast," the bearer admonished him. "First a burra salaam."

Dutifully the boy folded his hands, palm to palm, lifted them level with his face, and bowed so low that he could see all the little chips in the scarlet paint on her toenails. His own toes itched with eagerness to be out playing with the wind. He straightened himself, and again held out his hand.

But now the bearer had the kite, quizzing and fingering it. "Not all kites fly," he said. "Come, let us try." And he led the way purposefully down the steps and out onto the open lawn behind the house.

"It's *my* kite. It's *my* kite," moaned the wind, coming too.

"What about me?" piped the boy, dancing along behind. "What about me?"

"Watch, now!" The bearer tossed the kite to the air; and the strokes of the noonday gong boomed out across the tea bushes. The wind swooped and seized its kite, hullabalooing

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about with it. The bearer broke into an eager trot; the woman strode quickly after him, her pale hair wisped by the wind. She reached out and took the string, and held it a moment in a gaunt pink hand, looking deeply up, before she gave it to the boy.

"Wind," cried the boy, feeling the string taut and ardent in his fingers, "you wind, up there. What did I tell you, wind? A kite—a kite at noon." He sparkled and leapt, and watched the wind tasting its toy. He and the wind, both of them, laughing and tussling together.

The bearer was at his elbow, instructing: "Not that way, owl. Like this—" As if he needed to be taught how to play!

"If only we had a flat roof as we had when I was a boy! They fly best above a city. You ought to see the city kites at the sunset hour—"

But the boy ran out of hearing, and the wind, somersaulting overhead, swept the kite down sideways until it seemed to touch the blue, rimming hills; and then sent it springing back to the centre of the sky in one flawless, heart-soaring leap.

"Again, wind," he shouted enraptured, "again!" And his lifted face was laughing and golden.

She was there as well. "More string. Give it more string," she was urging. "All those trees make it difficult. You need a beach and summer sea to fly a kite properly."

Beach and summer sea? What did she mean? It wasn't for him to ask; and the bearer was silent. So her words were swept away in the sunshine, and caught up by the wind with its kite. City and roof, beach and summer sea—kite talk.

"I see you, wind," he shouted, snatching after the kite. And the two voices chased after him, "Mind the trees! Mind the trees!"

He glanced back. They were both looking up—the monkey and the buffalo—the two hands, one brown, one pink, shading the narrowed eyes in their dazzled faces: the two mouths stretched in smiles, strong, unexpected smiles, creasing their cheeks with delight, as if they saw it, too—the young wind.

☆ ☆ ☆

TORRENT OF WORDS

A professional Russian translator, faithful dictionary in hand, gave this memorable rendering of "a cascade DC amplifier with screened-grid valves"—"a magnifier in the form of a smooth current waterfall fitted with shaded lamps."

W. GREY WALTER,
The Living Brain

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SHOOTING A LINE

I am quickly jumping on my feet to kiss her hand

by JANE McCLURE

I AM old but every day I learn the new thing.

Take last Wednesday. Last Wednesday it is very hot as I am waiting to hear from Mr. Rathbone. There is no hurry. Mr. Rathbone may be here today, tomorrow, or next month. I do not know. I am having an espresso and watching a gondola loaded with cokes go down the canal. I am thinking of the great mysteries of life.

It is always during the wandering of my thoughts that I like to make up the little stories for the children. Not my children: I am bachelor. For all the children in the world. They do not pay me for this, but it is what I love to do.

I have already write the story of the squirrel who lives in the treetop with his nuts and in the winter gives them to the poor boy. In this I teach the children not to be selfish.

The city is hot, as I say. It is full of noise. The city is heavy with the tourist. If I look up, I see them flying in their metal birds in the sky. If I look straight ahead, I see them feeding the pigeons in San Màrco. If I look down, I see them deep under the sea with goggles for the eyes and flippers for the feet. The city is sinking from the weight of the tourist, and no one ever see a Venetian all day.

Except me. They have probably see me. I am up before they are sweeping the feathers from the piazza. I am renting the barge, hiring the concertina-player, and I am even finding the gondolier who can sing *O Sole Mio*. This is what they pay me for—Mr. Rathbone, at the moment, though I do not yet meet him. If you want an interpreter, a guide, a man who is speaking in six languages, I find you.

I find Mr. Rathbone with the letter. Mr. Rathbone is camera-man for the television show, *Video Vacation*, who is projecting to make the film, *Fondle her in the Gondola*. He will need the barge, the concertina, the gondolier, and the fire-boat. I do not understand the fire-boat. I read and read and I do not still understand the fire-boat. It is one of the great mysteries.

Just as I am having my second espresso, Gian Carlo comes

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running across the bridge with the telegram. (Gian Carlo is my cousin and he is working for the Telegram.) It is difficult to know why he is running so fast over the bridge because the telegram is two days late and Mr. Rathbone has already arrive.

When I catch Mr. Rathbone up, he is in the bar at the Grünwald having the whisky on the rock. He is tall man with very red face. The red face is not from the whisky; it is from India where he is filming the story, *Dally in the Old Delhi.*

We shake hands and he says he is very glad to meet me and do I make the arrangements? I tell him what I am doing and he says it is fine so far as it goes. For the next week we will pull together as the team to come over every obstacle. We will make the fine story. There is one thing, though, which maybe is difficult but it is very important. Though the barge, the concertina, and the gondolier are just what he is wanting, it is also a question of the fire-boats.

When I ask him why the fire-boats is a question, he answers it is not a question; it is a figure of speech. I am not pursuing the conversation any further along these lines.

It is essential that the Fire Department is co-operating us with some boats, he is going on, but when I ask what the fire-boats have to do with the *Vacation*, he says nothing whatever but his editor is requesting it in the special memorandum about the local colour, and is he needing to say any more?

He asks where he can phone me and I give him my card: *Count Vittorio Pallavicini.* My eyes, they are saying, yes, I am the Count: I am sorry, but it is so. I do not ask to be one. I am growing up in the great villa under the impression that life is waiting for to shine me the shoes. This is mistake, but not fatal, for, as I say, I am learning every day.

His wife is now there and the two children, and he is forcing to introduce. I wait. He is not saying Count, though; he is American and the Americans are not recognizing. He is not saying Vittorio because it is too familiar. Pallavicini, he is not pronouncing. Instead, he says, my wife, and I am quickly jumping on my feet to kiss her hand.

I also have the pleasure of meeting Gretchen and Armand. Mr. Rathbone explains me that Gretchen is born in Switzerland while he is working on *Yodel from the Jungfrau* and Armand is born on the *Pyrenee Picnic.* Such charming children! They are wearing the native costume—the blue jeans—but they are also wearing turbans. I pat them on the head.

When Mrs. Rathbone and the children take the siesta, Mr. Rathbone and I get into the barge to look at the locations. We

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go up and down the Grand Canal and then we come down and up. I am feeling the heat, but Mr. Rathbone says this is not comparing with India.

Mr. Rathbone is pleased with the barge and the concertina, but is feeling that the gondolier is not sufficient visual. I find another who is visual, but he is not singing.

We are in this dilemma when I see that Mr. Rathbone sees we are passing the Fire Department. The clouds are storming on his face. I say I can ensure him we have their co-operation, and when he asks am I certain, I say I am not only certain, I am positive, as I am happening to know gentleman from the Department who is personal friend, and one word from me is making the trick.

I do not know why I say this as I am never meeting this gentleman, but when I see that the storm is over, I know I am doing the right thing. Count, he says, I wish we had you on every story.

That night at Dominici's—I suggest Dominici's because they are giving me the free dinner for the new people—I am asking Mrs. Rathbone how she is finding Venice. She is finding the shop windows the loveliest in Europe when Mr. Rathbone gives her a sharp look up from the antipasto and explains me, for no reason at all, that she is once in the chorus. I am in the chorus too, I say, singing the *Ave Maria*, but Mrs. Rathbone says her chorus isn't singing.

When the lasagna comes, Mr. Rathbone asks me if the weather will be good for the shooting. I nod my head when he says this, but I do not know what he is meaning. He goes on to say that he plans to shoot the pigeons tomorrow, and on the next day, the Fire Department.

I am too polite to say that the pigeons are under legal protection and that if Mr. Rathbone is doing the shooting with the Fire Department, the Fire Department is doing back the shooting.

It is then, when I am looking Mr. Rathbone in the face, that I notice how red it really is. I am thinking his face is so red that it is as red as the lobster that Gian Carlo is serving. (Gian Carlo works at Dominici's on Wednesday.)

As I am thinking these thoughts I suddenly say to myself, Vittorio, you fool, why is it you have never write the story of the lobster for the children? You have write the squirrel. You will write the story of the lobster.

Not the big one. The little scampo who is Aldo and is living with his mamma and papa in the Adriatic. But Aldo, maybe he is bored. He wants to see the world and so he goes to the shore and he finds the castle of the little boy and he digs the tunnel

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and when the little boy is coming back from his lunch—I am thinking all this when I am hearing someone say, But are you absolutely sure?

And I am quick saying I am never in my life so sure, and that I am giving him my word that the Fire Department will co-operate, and he says, Count, I wish to heaven we had you on every story!

After the chianti arrives I am talking now about the meaning of life, for I see that Mrs. Rathbone is listening. In fact, she is listening so much that I am getting the feeling that I am not being understood, but it is too late.

I continue about the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, and then about the rise and fall of the Venetian Republic, but when I get to the part about how we are all just pibbles on the great bitch of time and I see the alarm spreading on the face of Mrs. Rathbone, I turn quickly to her husband and ask him how the lobster is, and he says it is delicious.

In the morning we take the picture of the pigeons with the two young lovers in the middle, but there is no shooting and I am relieved. Mr. Rathbone is working very hard. He is great photographer. He is taking forwards the picture and backwards the picture. Sometimes he is even taking upside-down the picture.

After lunch at Dominici's, Mrs. Rathbone decides she will go sightseeing. She is perhaps not in Venice so soon again and she is wanting to see all the shop windows she is able, so she can tell her grandchildren about them.

Mr. Rathbone, the children, and I are gliding the canal in the barge. And the two young lovers. It is very beautiful with all the old buildings reflecting, and it is cool when we stop under the Sighing Bridge to wait for the gondolier. He is the one I am hiring in the beginning and when he comes, we are putting the young lovers in the gondola, we are giving the gondolier the concertina, and we are making the picture as he is singing *O Sole Mio.*

He is still insufficient visual, but Mr. Rathbone is making the picture over the back of his head so it is all right.

While Mr. Rathbone is working I am telling the children the story of the squirrel in the treetop, but they do not like the story, and Mr. Rathbone is calling me back they do not understand the language. They are now speaking in the obscure Hindustani dialogue which they pick up from the aged servant.

I am settling back in the barge. When I look at the water, I think of Aldo, the little boy Francesco, who is coming all the way

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from Roma to take the vacation. With his mamma? Yes. With his papa? No. His papa is in the government, and the government is sitting all the summer in the building.

I am so liking this idea that already I am seeing the illustration. Gian Carlo makes the illustration as he is clever boy. While I see that Aldo is bright red with the smiling mouth and the black feelers, I see that Francesco is brown from the sun in the bathing-suit. Wait a minute, Gian Carlo, I am suddenly reminding! It will not do. The lobster is not red; she is green, the colour of the noodles in the lasagna.

Then I am hearing someone say, We are here. You will have to change it, you idiot, I insist, but it is not Gian Carlo where I am looking: it is Mr. Rathbone. He does not hear for he is pointing to me out something. He is not needing to tell me what he is pointing to me out. I know. I am ready, I say, standing up in the barge, for the destiny is already casting me the die.

Signor Preti rises when we come into the office. He is a big, round man with too much pasta in the stomach. Before five minutes I have introduce Mr. Rathbone, and we are saying buon giorno and sitting in the wicker chairs. Everyone is smiling.

Unfortunately, this is not for long. When I ask Signor Preti if he can make a boat to our disposal, he is leaning back in his chair and saying to me that he would be happy to do this for us but he is afraid that it will cost 350,900 lire. Impossible! How can this be, I am saying. I think too that this is not the hospitality. In front of strangers to be saying these things is reflecting discredit on the whole city and on me as a Venetian.

What is he saying, Mr. Rathbone is wanting to know. Then I interpret him that Signor Preti says he will be happy to do this.

Signor Preti, I say, turning back, consider you a moment. I explain him that this is not the big Hollywoods picture; this is the little picture. I explain him the young lovers, the concertina, and *O Sole Mio*. I explain him how we show the life of the city—the wedding party in the morning, the funeral party in the evening, the fire-boat. One boat. We will be so thankful.

I even say I know he is the kind of man who does not bargain with the stranger, but he says I am making the mistake and what do we want to come here bothering for?

Vittorio, Mr. Rathbone is asking. When I hear him say Vittorio, I know that he is trusting and we are the friends, and I am deeply moving. I also sweat the profusion. It is hotter here than ever it is in the old Delhi. Mr. Rathbone, I say, he is asking what we want.

One little boat, I beg Signor Preti. Pleading, pushing aside the dignity. For ten minutes of the hour. For five. He will

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give us one little boat all right, he says, and here he is making the gesture which even today it pains me to remember.

Vittorio? I know what Mr. Rathbone is wanting me to say and I say it. He will give us the boat.

Vittorio is doing it again, Mr. Rathbone tells his wife that night at Dominici's, but I do not listen. I am hearing the praise but I am sad. I cannot eat the food; I cannot drink the drink.

At home my aunt boils me the egg. Gian Carlo says I must eat. I do not. I walk the floor. In my voice there is anger. My aunt and Gian Carlo are worrying. It is his night for the Telegram and he will be late, so why am I not eating the egg?

How can I eat the egg, I say, when I receive the insult in the face, when I give my word, when everything is depending and nothing is happening? They are sorry about this but I must eat the egg. Not paying them the attention, I go out to the balcony. I am depressing, and when I am depressing, I am depressing.

To get off my mind Mr. Rathbone, I think of Aldo and what about he is doing. But it is no better. Francesco is in his room packing because his father is expecting. Francesco hasn't the idea that the fisherman is catching Aldo up in the pot and is leaving him to collect later. How can Francesco save his friend when he is going away with his mamma? I do not know, and I am even more depressing. My aunt is now saying I have to pull myself to pieces. But it is not until Gian Carlo is repeating that he has to go to the Telegram that I am no longer confusing.

Gian Carlo, I say, you give me the great idea. I see that his mouth is opening in misunderstanding, but I do not have the time to explain him. Francesco is going to be able to save his friend because he is not departing. His mamma is reading the telegram from his papa. They will stay another three days because the government is meeting. I embrace my aunt. I embrace Gian Carlo. We are the happy family.

Until I remember that Mr. Rathbone is also in the pot. It is almost spoil for me the whole feeling. But it is not. Wait just a minute, I say to myself. If the telegram is getting Aldo out of the pot, why isn't the telegram getting Mr. Rathbone out, too? We are going to send another telegram, Gian Carlo, I announce him as his mouth opens wider. You will go to the office. You will make me up the small telegram. From the government, I add. The Minister from the Interior comes tomorrow and is wanting to see the small—please change that to big, I correct him when I think of the insult—demonstration.

Gian Carlo is shaking the head, no, but I am fixing him in the eye, and he will do it.

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How can I describe the spectacle in the small words? It is not possible. Up and down in front of San Marco they are sailing. Motor boats. Uniforms. Ladders. And everywhere the water. I am relieving. Mr. Rathbone is gratifying, and all the tourist on the water bus are looking where is the fire.

Just before we are going to the hotel, Mr. Rathbone tells me there is one more thing. What is this thing, I ask. We are having to thank Signor Preti: he is giving us the key, so we are having to thank for the key. I try to explain him that it is not necessary; it is merely the example of the hospitality, but it is too late, as Mr. Rathbone is steering the barge to the pier where we can see Signor Preti.

I close my eyes as we get out of the boat, for I am fearing that Signor Preti is leaving the sour taste, but when I open them I see that everyone is smiling. I look closer. I see that Signor Preti is not really smiling but is trying to look like he is smiling. Why, I ask myself.

There is again the one answer. Signor Preti is not sure where is the man from the Interior. He is in the middle of the demonstration, and it is doing him no good to get into the argument.

Mr. Rathbone is telling me to tell Signor Preti how much he is gratifying; I am telling Signor Preti what it is I have in the mind about him; Signor Preti is urging me to go to the unholy place, but we are all shaking very hard the hands.

Mr. Rathbone is leaving yesterday for the new story, *Motor to Montevideo.* After he is paying me what he owes, I take them all to the party. First we go to the Gritti, then to Dominici's—for, like my squirrel, I must store up the nuts for the winter—and late we go to Harry's Bar to have the last whisky on the rock.

The next day before they go, I see Gretchen and Armand waiting by the luggage. When I see they are now wearing the hat of the gondolier and speaking Italian, I tell them the story of Aldo and it is great success. I pat them on the head.

When Mrs. Rathbone says good-bye, I kiss the hand. She says she will always remember the shop windows and hopes she will be back. It is an emotionated parting.

Though Mr. Rathbone is overhanging from the party, he says, Vittorio, hell, if we only had you on every story!

I am old, but every day I am learning the new thing.

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Do not remove a fly from a friend's forehead with a hatchet.
Chinese proverb

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MARINA

But ye are a woman, and a man wad sail
To hell in yer company

GEORGE MACDONALD

Pursuing beauty, men descry
The distant shore and long to prove
(Still richer in variety)
The treasures of the land of love.
We women, like weak Indians, stand
Inviting from our golden coast
The wandering rovers to our land:
But she who trades with 'em is lost.

For love is but discovery,
When that is made, the pleasure's done.

THOMAS SOUTHERNE, *Sir Antony Love*, 1691

Dangerous Delay

Originally there were two of these islands: one Feminea, inhabited solely by women; the other, Masculea, by men alone. The legend was probably started by Marco Polo, but the latter island held no interest for sailors, and they ignored and forgot it.

The legend of the Isle of Women was enlarged upon and amplified in many ways. All the inhabitants were young, tall, beautiful, and very passionate, and for three months each year they welcomed the intimate companionship of all males, especially sailors. There was no toil required of the visitors, the island dripped with fruit and honey, and the entire time was to be spent in amorous dalliance. At the end of three months the visitors would be asked to leave, and to take with them all male children that had reached adolescence.

Columbus believed in the existence of this legendary island. On his homeward passage in 1493, he determined to visit it and bring five or six of the women to his sovereigns. He had placed it as the island now known as Martinique, and he set his course for it. However, the condition of the *Nina* and *Pinta* was such —both were making water—that on second thought he considered the women they might collect not to be worth the dangerous delay.

FRANK SHAY and EDWARD A. WILSON,
A Sailor's Treasury

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Open Sesame

In blue Bristol city at tall-tide I wandered
Down where the sea-masts their signals were shining,
I heard a proud seaman on the poop-deck reclining
Shout to the stars that about the ship blundered
—On the high harbour lie six shifty daughters
Their bodies are straight, their eyes are wide
Here is the key of their burly bedchamber—
I have unlocked it, I replied . . .

CHARLES CAUSLEY,
Ballad of the Five Continents

Turkish Delight

The 26th in the Archipelago I spoke with a large French ship who was hired by the Grand Signior and had a Turkish Basha on board with twenty-six of his women, wives and others, and many Turks on board going to Candia. I sent them presents, and as it was calm and I wanted to see if I could get the women to the windows, I sent my music in boats under her stern, by which means I saw several of them with my glass.

Augustus Hervey's Journal, May 1748

Deep Strategy

. . . She had a voice of silver and lips of coral red,
She climbed the dolphin-striker and kissed the figurehead.

Then every starry evening she'd swim in the foam
About the bows, a-singing like a nightingale at home;
She'd call to him and sing to him as sweetly as a bird,
But the wooden-headed effigy he never said a word . . .

She couldn't get an answer to her tears or moans,
So she went and told her daddy, told the ancient Davy Jones!
Old Davy damned his eyesight and puzzled of his wits,
Then whistled up his hurricanes and tore the brig to bits.

Down on the ocean-bed, green fathoms deep,
Where the wrecks lie rotting and great sea-serpents creep,
In a gleaming grotto all built of sailors' bones,
Sits the handsome figurehead, listening to Miss Jones . . .

CROSBIE GARSTIN, *The Figurehead*

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Landfall

Garibaldi is possibly the only man to have picked out a wife by telescope, on an unknown shore. One day, on the quarter-deck of his vessel off Brazil, he decided to seek a wife in order to dispel his melancholy. Casting his spyglass on the houses ashore he saw a young girl, and at once ordered sailors to row him to land. He had some difficulty in finding the right house and, stopping at one door to inquire, was invited to take coffee. Inside was the girl, Anita. " We both remained in an ecstatic silence gazing at each other," said Garibaldi; then at last he told her she must belong to him. " I seemed to have some magnetic power in my insolence," he boasted.

E. S. TURNER, *A History of Courting*

The Mermaiden

There was a lily and rose sea-maiden
In marvellous depths of far-away seas,
Whose eyes were blue, and whose head was laden
With luminous curls like the honey of bees.

Half hidden by corals, and swaying rushes,
And vines of the ocean, she sat arrayed
In a tremulous veil of delicate blushes
And robes of quivering light and shade.

The sun-fish came to worship her graces;
The dog-fish lingered, and marvelled beside;
And she gaily smiled in their whimsical faces,
And sang them songs till they laughed or cried.

A poet of earth looked down upon her,
And loved and beckoned, and told his love;
But her soul was coy with a sea-maiden's honour,
And she would not go to the world above.

J. W. DE FOREST, *A Seaside Story*

Becalmed

23rd April. Put into Dover . . . The ladies had dinner by themselves, and the gentlemen got lively over their wine. One of Mr. Dove's " landlubbers " also got lively, and chased Ellen, Ann's maid, the length of the deck. Walter ordered the man to be " cooled off," so Mr. Dove had him put into a sack at the end of a rope and dipped into the sea. Methinks we shall have no more trouble with *him*.

PETER CAREW, *Combat and Carnival*

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CIRCLE OF PANIC

There was a latent menace about him that set him apart

by JOHN SALT

DETECTIVE INSPECTOR Edward Rosewarne walked along Kingsway in the early morning, a tall grey man in a soft hat and a dark blue raincoat. He was heavily built and his shoes were size twelve, but he made surprisingly little sound upon the pavement as he moved along with rapid and purposeful strides.

His alert manner was an index of the man, but the Inspector was not at his best this morning. He had been at work for most of the night and had shaved with cold water and toilet soap, so that his cheeks and mouth were still stiff with yesterday's face.

There were few people about, and the youth who loitered near the Holborn Tube was unable to conceal himself before the Inspector passed. Rosewarne gave him an unpleasant smile, which the boy acknowledged with the merest flicker of an eyelid. At Remnant Street, Rosewarne turned left and walked beneath the cloisters to the outer square of Lincoln's Inn. He was looking for somebody and he expected to find him, even at this early hour.

The Inspector entered a small park and walked towards the central shelter. His eyes, roving from left to right along the dew-damp benches, found Jacob Mannix in his usual place and engaged upon his usual employment.

At first glance the man looked a derelict like a hundred others who sleep rough in the City, but there was in his appearance an element of the bizarre and a suggestion of latent menace that marked him clearly apart from the rest.

Mannix was about sixty, and the most prominent feature of his sunken yellow face was a great hooked nose. His eyes were sombre, deep-set, and shadowed by a high, bony forehead. He wore no hat, and his head was covered by heavy locks of greasy black hair, which framed his face and descended upon the shoulders of a tattered blue greatcoat. This garment was secured in part by the original buttons and in part by blackened string, cunningly latticed and knotted. The material strained apart at the chest, and Rosewarne could see the numerous jackets and waistcoats which the man wore beneath.

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He sat hunched upon the bench, his feet lost in outsize, unpolished boots, nailed and metalled at sole and heel. A sheet of newspaper covered his knees, and on this there rested perhaps a pound of loose yellow tobacco, the gutter-gleanings of a thousand cigarette-ends that had been carefully preserved and brought to him. By his side lay another, smaller pile of tobacco, together with several packets of fresh cigarette-papers and an empty tin box.

His hands, half-covered by frayed blue woollen mittens, were well shaped, the fingers long and spatulate. He moved them continually among the yellow strands, picking, teasing, and tearing, pausing to lay a damp or soiled particle to one side, selecting a fresh paper, and forming a loose cylinder which he rolled, folded, and tapped before placing it in the tin box.

Rosewarne had seen him do all this many times before, but he stood and watched in growing fascination.

Indeed, he had been fascinated by Mannix for years, ever since the day Rosewarne took off the blue uniform to put on plain clothes and take Holborn as his manor. He had been a slow learner, and many of his early mistakes had been made over Mannix. He had booked him once on suspicion, and his ears burnt when he recalled the Superintendent's caustic lecture upon the value of evidence in routine police work.

Lack of evidence had always been the limiting factor; nobody had ever been able to pin anything on Mannix, although it was plain enough that the man was closely involved in most of the local crime. It was safe to say that he never mixed with the big operators, but the sum total of his probable enterprises made him a person impossible to ignore in any investigation.

Then, too, he seemed to exert an influence upon his associates that was out of all proportion to his apparent worth. Men feared him, but in all Rosewarne's experience, not one had ever told tales about him in court. It was hard to say how far his power extended through the underworld, but privately the Inspector defined him as a latter-day Jonathan Wild, even while knowing the analogy to be false or, at best, incomplete.

Mannix treated Rosewarne always with a kind of cynical respect and had even helped the policeman from time to time. The Inspector never knew what impelled Mannix to the veiled confidences, the half-hints which on occasion put paid to projected raids, but he had formed the conclusion that the tobacco man was guided by his own set of ethics which in all probability had little in common with the rules of organized society upheld by the Commissioner of Metropolitan Police.

Information laid by Jacob Mannix had frequently led to arrest

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but rarely to conviction. There was a point at which he stopped short. Dog does not eat dog, and Mannix invariably withheld the clinching evidence, appearing to derive a perverse pleasure from thwarting the ultimate process of the law.

His profits must have been considerable but he made no outward concession to prosperity, and Rosewarne guessed shrewdly that Mannix relished not so much money as the power that it brought. He lived at various accommodation addresses in the East End but spent his days upon a park bench, working interminably at his cigarette-making.

He had his customers too, men and women of all kinds who bought them. As a young man Rosewarne had watched these transactions with incredulity, finally deciding that they served as a clumsy blind for illegal activity. It was this assumption that had caused him to arrest Mannix and thereby earn the withering scorn of his superior.

" Somebody will take Mannix one day, but it won't be you," the Superintendent had told him unkindly and the words still rankled. Rosewarne had determined that, when one day Mannix missed a trick, he would be there to pick it up. He knew now that the customers were paid gossips who brought Mannix any news of the underworld that he did not already know. Mannix had his own secret uses for the information received.

Some of it came Rosewarne's way, and this morning he hoped for more. His worldly, experienced policeman's brain told him that Mannix might at last be in danger of dropping that important, final trick.

Something had gone wrong, one small plan among scores of others more successful. And all because a stupid boy had squeezed the trigger of a gun, and another, as yet unidentified, had run away.

Rosewarne looked down at the old man busily weaving his tobacco strands, and he wondered how the cards would fall.

" You are very busy today," he said pleasantly.

The tobacco man answered him in a voice that was harsh and cracked and altogether foreign. " I am always busy," he said, and seemed disposed to leave it at that.

Rosewarne sat down on the bench at some distance from the other and drew out his own cigarette-case. He lit up and sat for some moments in silence, squinting through his smoke at the wire netting of the tennis courts beyond the trees.

" Lantern comes up for trial this morning," he remarked conversationally. " We don't think he will get off."

Mannix shrugged his shoulders. " You think I should be surprised? " he queried with a malicious intonation.

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Rosewarne was immediately irritated. "He'll get justice," he said flatly.

"We all get justice, more or less, Inspector. Will he get mercy?"

"Did he show mercy?"

"Oi yoi! Inspector! Why so hasty this morning? Did you come to see me so early in order to talk ethics?"

Rosewarne shook off his momentary anger, and a new eagerness crept into his voice as he turned once more to Mannix, whose fingers still burrowed in the tobacco. "I remember you always said there were two on that Woolwich job."

"So what? It was just an opinion, which you did not share."

"I have changed my mind. I think I may even have a line on the man I want. The real man that is."

The fingers of Mannix paused almost imperceptibly. Rosewarne gave him a swift glance and continued: "The weakness of the police case sticks out a foot. We never found the gun, and the prosecution evidence is entirely circumstantial, based for the most part upon Lantern's own statement.

"A man was killed and the boy never attempted to deny that he was in the warehouse at the time we judged the shooting to have taken place. Lantern once carried a gun of the type that killed the watchman, but he did not have it with him when we picked him up shortly afterwards. So either he threw the gun away at once or there was somebody else with him who took it.

"It's up to judge and jury now, of course. They may throw the case out of court or the boy may hang. Personally, I think he will, but what galls me is that somebody else, equally guilty, looks like going scot-free."

"You said you had a line," remarked Mannix dreamily.

"It isn't much to go on, but I have known worse. Two girls were passing the warehouse at the time. They were scared to come forward before, but now they'll swear that they heard the shots fired and saw two men—two, mark you—dash out of the building and run past them down the street."

"Description?" Mannix asked softly.

"None, I'm afraid. It was a dark night, of course, but they are quite sure that there were two men."

"Interesting, Inspector, a useful gambit for the defence. But why come to me about it?"

"Because you have a wide connection among your, shall we say, customers, and because I think you know or guess something."

"Such nonsense, Inspector. I said what I did to you because such jobs are rarely done alone, particularly by young men. They

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are afraid of the dark, every shadow is an enemy, and there must always be one to watch and one to climb."

"You have some sort of shrewd idea beyond all that, I am sure of it," said Rosewarne impatiently.

"It is but a step to say that I organized this raid and know both men. Why not take it, Inspector?"

"Because I could not prove it," Rosewarne said grimly.

The other nodded his head. "And if I had this information, to what end should I tell you? Would it save the other foolish boy? They are both equally guilty under the law, as you yourself have said."

Rosewarne was dogged. "It is not a question of saving anybody. Look here, Mannix, you people have no more time for a gunman than I have. They are mad things, fit only to be locked up. If this killer gets away with it now, he will do it again some time—you know the kind. And if he has any idea that somebody suspects him, you can be pretty sure who the next victim will be."

The shaft went home and Mannix sat silent, his fingers idle for the moment. "I should worry," he said at length. "I am not the kind of informer you want, Inspector. And, in any case, what could I do for you, sitting here all day long, making cigarettes from sweepings?"

"You beat me, Mannix," the Inspector said bitterly. "First you half sell me the idea of two men and now you don't want to know about it. I thought the boy up at the Bailey was some connection of yours. Don't you want to help?"

The tobacco man looked thoughtful. "The connection is very slight," he said. "Certainly, I lived once with his parents, and it is a fact that I was there the night you picked him up. I am sorry, Inspector, but there would have to be more in it than that, or any action I took to help you might be misunderstood. I have my other customers to consider, after all, and they too must be protected."

Rosewarne looked at him in exasperation and then, quite deliberately, played a trump. "I have talked to the boy myself, you know." He let the words fall idly, but watched Mannix as he spoke. "Lantern makes out that he never had any money from the warehouse and he won't talk about a partner."

"It is known that the safe was rifled," returned Mannix calmly.

"That's true enough, but the boy still says he never had the money."

"And you believe the boy?"

"I believe him."

Jacob Mannix laid his mittened hands upon his knees and

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sighed deeply. "A man does not lie in the face of death," he said. "And that is well, for my customers do not like a liar. Such people are bad for our business."

He fell silent for a moment or two while Rosewarne watched him closely, then began to speak again in a slow, musing voice.

"There is a legend above the entrance to the Old Bailey. What does it say, now? *Defend the children of the poor and punish the wrongdoer.* Brave words, Inspector, fine words, when they mean what they say. But what shall we do, we children of the poor, when our laws and our protectors cannot help us? Why, then, we must defend ourselves and punish our guilty in our own way."

He turned his strange dark eyes full upon Rosewarne. "Our ways would not be your ways, Inspector. I think I should tell you that."

Rosewarne smiled without mirth and got to his feet. "Shall I hear from you?" he asked.

Mannix shrugged again. "I am always here," he said.

The Inspector turned upon his heel and walked away. He did not think that he had been altogether wise, but he invariably judged wisdom by results and was content to wait, say, forty-eight hours for the outcome. He realized that the missing money had been the lever needed to enlist the support of the old man, but he knew also that Mannix was not so much concerned with the loss of a few hundred pounds as with the defection of the thief.

One of his men had stepped out of line, a thing that Mannix could not forgive, as his own ultimate safety depended upon the solidarity of his followers. It remained to be seen, therefore, whether the police would fish a new unidentified body from the river within the next two days, or whether Mannix would think it worth his while to turn the culprit over to the law, a course not without danger to himself.

Left alone, the tobacco man returned at once to his work. Pick and tease and tear, put the damp to one side, roll and fold and tap.

The day grew busier with people and now an odd assortment of visitors began to call upon him, casually, by ones and twos, so that their arrival and departure should cause no comment. They ranged from vagrants, derelicts, seedy young men, and bloods in Edwardian suits to dapper little clerks, smooth-coated business men, and others of heavily respectable appearance.

Later that day, they might have been seen making telephone calls from street booths, visiting lodging-houses and the newspaper rooms of public libraries, looking into Soho cellar clubs and

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cheap, brown dining-saloons in the poorer districts. Very industrious they were, quiet and unobtrusive, losing themselves in a purposeful way among the lanes and alleys of the city, stopping to ask a civil question here, calling for a drink there. Very busy indeed.

The net fanned wide over the city for a day and a night, beginning to contract when the observers met and compared information. Much of it tallied, and at lunch-time the net was drawn suddenly tight around a house in Streatham where, in a room on the top floor, a youth, lying fully clothed on the tumbled bed, was suddenly awakened by a violent banging at his door.

His hand went at once beneath the pillow and closed upon a gun. Carrying it behind him, he stood to one side of the door and opened it with a long arm.

A slatternly blonde girl stood outside, eyeing him sullenly. She said abruptly, "Mum says you've got to go."

For a second, the terror of the naked streets flared in the eyes of the youth, but he quickly recovered, and blustered at the girl, "You tell the old cow my money's as good as the next one's and I'll go when I'm good and ready, not before."

He made to close the door, but a foot was in the way.

"You'll pay up and go now," a gentle, lisping voice told him. Its owner stepped into the room; he was a slim, dark exquisite with a permanent wave and an expensive suit.

"You know me, Dude," said the first youth. "Tell her I don't have to go. I can't go, you know that." His voice squeaked on the final words.

The Dude smiled at him kindly. "When you got to go, you got to go," he said, and kicked his friend sharply upon the shin, causing him to drop the gun. "Better go quietly, Frank. This is a respectable house, isn't it, Daisy?" The girl giggled at him.

Frank swore at them both and tried to grab the gun. But the Dude was there before him and, holding the weapon in a gloved hand, he forced Frank from the room and down the stairs. It was the work of a moment to unlatch the front door and push him out into the unsafe daylight streets.

The gun was delivered to Rosewarne an hour later. It was wrapped in a handkerchief, and he sent it at once to the laboratory. Their report and that of the finger-print records department reached him with his afternoon tea. A tentative identity had been established, and now a second net began to float out over the city. Rosewarne decided to stay by his telephone.

Meanwhile Frank boarded a bus and travelled down to the Elephant. Still bewildered by the rapid turn of events, and unwilling to believe that an organization on which he had so much

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relied was now lined up against him, he wasted precious hours visiting known houses. But the word had gone out, and nobody would give him shelter.

Bewilderment was giving place to something very like fear when, in the late afternoon, he turned his steps towards the river. Arrangements had earlier been made for a sea voyage. Certainly, he was a few days too soon, but surely he could lie aboard quietly until the sailing-date. The prospect brightened at the thought, and he crossed the river, going east towards Poplar where there was a pub he knew and a man who might help.

It was hard to lose a sense of nakedness, and he missed too the familiar weight of the gun in his pocket. He could not remember feeling like this before, but now it seemed that everybody was looking at him and knew all about him. He supposed you got like that after a while, cooped up in one room, never going out, never seeing anybody.

For days he had refused to think, but now the events of the night in the warehouse flooded back into his mind. He thought, too, about Jackie in Pentonville. The papers said he was up at the Bailey today. Suppose they topped him? He began to wonder what it was really like on that nine o'clock walk they joked about. Suppose you don't feel much. Doped you were, like as not, gave you a drink or something. He shuddered in the misty evening air, forcing the terrible thoughts from his brain. He couldn't help it about Jackie, could he? Bloody fool, he was. Only mugs got caught. He snatched comfort from the assurance.

Frank climbed on an east-bound bus at the Bank. It was filled with home-going office workers and now he was glad of their normal, noisy presence crowding about him, hemming him in. They made him feel better and some of the unreasoning terror left him. The defection of the Dude still bothered him a little, but at least he did not have to worry too much about the police. Nobody had tumbled that one yet.

And then he remembered the gun and a dead weight of dread settled suddenly at his heart. Suppose the Dude had taken it to the cops . . . Suppose there were prints on it . . . There must have been, for sure.

His loaded brain went wheeling in tight circles of panic and he fought his way off the bus, no longer able to bear the slow, jolting progress and terrified now of all these anonymous, omniscient people who pressed themselves against him. He snatched at an evening paper, barely remembering to throw the man his coppers, and stood beneath a street lamp to race through the pages, hardly knowing what he sought.

The day's proceedings at the Old Bailey were headlined on the

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front page. There was no new police evidence and his labouring heart began to slow. He clutched at straws of hope. It was going to be all right. No need to panic.

He got back on another bus which was less crowded and went upstairs to read his paper in peace. He glanced at the comics and the sport and then turned idly to the small advertisements. The conductor, coming up to take his fare, found the youth crouched in his seat, staring at a neat, ruled box at the head of the first column. The text was very brief, but it brought Frank's world of illusion crashing down in fragments.

He read it again and again until the words were burnt into his brain. *The Wages of Sin are Known to the Man in the Park.*

To the casual reader, it would seem merely the stunt of some harmless religious crank, but to the initiated, like Frank, it meant something infinitely more terrible. He had sometimes heard of things like this. It was a grim joke among the boys. They called it " being on the spot," and they laughed, but they did not really think it very funny. It was something that happened when you stepped out of line, and then your own mates had orders to turn against you and you couldn't find help anywhere. Now it had happened to Frank, and in his heart he knew why.

The shock cleared his wits and he began to think more rationally. Speed was essential. To escape he had to keep ahead, and now he cursed the hours he had wasted at the Elephant. But things were not yet quite hopeless: there was still the boat.

The conductor looked at Frank curiously when he left the bus. He saw a thin, shock-headed youth, wild-eyed and white-faced, dressed in a long, loose drape jacket and tight trousers with exaggeratedly narrow legs. Frank glared back as he jumped off, and quickly lost himself in the shadows of a side street.

He walked swiftly towards the dim lights of the public house, but he knew that he was too late the moment he opened the door and looked inside.

There were two men in the saloon bar. One was the mate of the ship he had hoped to board; the other was the Dude. The seaman looked round once and turned his broad back upon him. His action was as final as the closing of a door. The Dude smiled in his gentle and dangerous way at Frank who paused only a moment at the door before bolting back into the night.

He trudged wearily to the corner of the street and stood there, irresolute. The Dude passed close by him and he heard the soft voice say: " Never mind, it's rough on the water tonight, sailor. You'll be better off on dry land."

For the time, he was beyond thought, and he tramped along in the shadows, grateful only for these moments of darkness and

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solitude. Then, very slowly, his brain began to function once more and his first thought was, " I'll go up West." He looked around for a bus stop. His eye caught the lighted window of a café. " Feel better for a cup of tea and some grub," he said aloud, and crossed the road.

The café was misty and cold. Frank collected his steaming food from the counter and took it away to a corner of the room where there were chill marble-topped tables. He sat down at one of them and cradled his hands around the hot cup. The tea revived him and he began to eat his food.

After a few moments the door bell jangled and a tramp walked in. The room was empty, but he ignored the other tables and walked straight across to Frank's without buying anything, and sat down facing the boy. He was a round-faced, pink little man with scanty white hair, and his eyes were smiling and jolly.

Frank tried to ignore him and get on with his food, but the man watched every mouthful and, at length, he stretched a timid hand across the table and touched the boy's arm.

" Better go to the Park, son," he said gently.

The fugitive jumped up, every nerve screaming. His plate and cup crashed to the floor as he reached across the table to clutch the tramp.

But the little man evaded him. " Don't forget," he called from the door, " you're wanted in the Park."

Frank bolted out of the café and set off down the street, running hard. The sight of a policeman slowed him up and he darted across the road into a Tube station where he bought a ticket to Tottenham Court Road.

Standing on the corner by the Dominion Theatre felt like home. He stared hungrily for a moment at the warm, lighted foyer, thronged with well-fed, unworried people, then ducked across the road against the lights, and headed towards Charing Cross.

The pattern of treachery was now quite clear. They meant to force him into the open and keep him there without the protection of the underworld until he obeyed orders or was picked up by the police. He walked on fast, thinking desperately. He played for a moment with the idea of trying to drive a bargain with the Dude over the money from the warehouse, but decided against it. Likely as not, the hiding-place had already been discovered and, in any case, the Dude had his orders and was the man to obey them.

A heavy transport lorry stood parked outside a café and he halted a moment nearby. The busy street was filled with hurrying people intent on their own affairs. In a moment, he had

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swung himself unnoticed over the tail-board and beneath the tarpaulin load-covers.

Seconds later, the sheets were whipped away and he was hauled out by his collar to be dumped again in the road. The driver stood over him menacingly.

" Copper shop for you, me lad," he said in broad Yorkshire, and looked around for a policeman.

Frank noticed the Dude standing beside the driver. " Don't let's be hasty," he was pleading with the driver. " I just saw this lad climbing into the back and thought I'd better tell you. I don't want to make any more trouble for him. Do me a favour in return and let him go. I don't suppose you've got any time to waste."

" You're right there, mate," said the driver and released Frank with a cuff to the head. " Be off with you," he growled. " Think yourself lucky."

The Dude fell into step beside Frank. " Silly boy," he said. " In a main road like that—thought you was better trained. By the way, Frank, I hope you got the little message all right? You won't forget now, will you? "

He made to turn away but Frank stumbled after him, clutching at his arm.

" Dude! " he gasped. " Dude, you got to help me! "

" Why? " asked the other calmly.

" We've always been friends," said Frank weakly.

" Ah, but friends don't seem to matter much to you, Frank. You had one on that Woolwich job, didn't you? Young Jackie Lantern. What happened to him? "

" I couldn't help him getting caught, straight I couldn't. What do you expect me to do about it, anyway? Go running to the beak and say, ' Let 'im off, your honour, it was me that did it.' —Would *you*, Dude? "

" I'm not saying I would, but I'd certainly have boxed a bit more clever over the money."

Frank became sullen.

" What money? I never had no money."

The Dude was contemptuous. " We heard wrong, then. You'd better go and tell that to him in the Park. He'll love it, won't he just? Wouldn't keep him waiting too long, either, not if I was you."

Frank suddenly lost control. " You can't do anything to me," he screamed.

" I wouldn't take bets on that, Frankie boy. I certainly wouldn't take bets on it. Get lost now. Here comes the law."

He wandered off into the night.

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Frank, taking the hint, hugged himself into the shadows at the approach of a policeman.

Now he stood alone again, hands clenched and toes hooked painfully inside his hot suede shoes. He tasted fear in his mouth and it ran from him in sweat, which soaked his clothing and made him shiver in the night wind. It was better walking and he moved slowly west towards Piccadilly, keeping always on the fringe of the Circus, wandering aimlessly up and down in the maze of alleys behind the cinemas and hotels, conscious all the time of being watched.

It was fear itself that gave him the courage at last to step from the shadows into the bright lights of the Circus. The flaring bulbs of a news theatre directly faced him. He fumbled out a shilling and pushed his way into the warm, dark auditorium, choosing a seat in the centre of a row, with people elbowing him on each side. Once again, as on the bus, their close presence gave him comfort.

Frank watched the programme round several times and might have sat a great deal longer but for a disturbance in the front row. A man was hauled from his seat and led away to the exit, where a policeman took charge of him.

All the boy's fear rose again and he left the auditorium swiftly by a side door.

It was nearly midnight, the streets were almost empty, and men were closing the Tube entrances. Two or three women still waited about on corners, but beyond them the lighted streets were bleak and chill under a light rain.

Frank hunched his thin shoulders against the weather and plunged across the Circus, walking down past the opulent shipping offices towards Trafalgar Square.

He knew quite well what he must eventually do, but he kept putting it off, giving himself another ten minutes, another half-hour, and all the time he took streets that would lead him farther away from his ultimate destination.

He knew the hunters would not let him go too far. They watched him all the way; there were eyes, he felt, in every dark doorway.

Now and then he would walk right out into the deserted street, swinging suddenly on his heel to stare back along the way he had come. There was never anybody there. After a while he grew tired of it, and did not care if they watched him or not.

He was in the Strand now, walking east, and he turned hurriedly down Villiers Street. The Tube grilles were closed against him and he had to turn right again at the bottom and beneath the

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railway bridge to reach the Embankment. The wide, dark river frightened him and he kept to the far side of the road, away from the water.

Along the South Bank the rings and strings of neon advertisements were blurred and starred to his eyes, dilated now by the sad and persistent rain.

Frank was soaking wet and utterly wretched, bone-tired and achingly cold. It took him half an hour of slow, painful walking to reach Blackfriars and there, in the lee of the station, he found an all-night café.

He sat down at a window, staring out at the rain and drinking great mugs of tea while the porters and rivermen watched him with speculative curiosity.

He remained there until the early editions of the morning papers arrived and would have stayed until full day if he had not seen his own face staring at him from the front page. The proprietor had seen it, too, and was already whirling the dial of his telephone.

Frank hurried out before anybody could stop him. The canyon of the Thames was filled with white mist concealing the water, and turning his back on the river, he strode up New Bridge Street.

Morning was near: the chimes of St. Paul's struck half past four as he reached the Viaduct bridge and turned aside to climb the echoing stairs where the ghosts of night still lingered.

He stayed a long time in the staircase, and one who climbed softly down from above found him crouched upon the second landing, silent and still. The watcher withdrew and waited upon High Holborn until five o'clock chimed from the City and Frank emerged.

Within seconds of his appearance, the telephone shrilled at Rosewarne's bedside. The caller gave no name and scant information, but it was sufficient to get the Inspector out of his bed, out of the house, and into his car before ten minutes had passed. He parked in Remnant Street and walked quietly down to join Mannix on his bench.

The men gave each other no greeting, but sat and waited while the uncertain day gained strength.

There seemed more movement in the park than could have been caused by waking bird or animal, and the Inspector would have said, had he been asked, that there were perhaps a dozen men, well concealed behind hedge and tree, who waited like themselves.

Twenty minutes passed before a stumbling shuffle of footsteps

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approached along a bend in the path hidden by foliage. Rosewarne inched forward on his seat, but Mannix remained motionless, with mittened hands resting in his lap. "Like patience on a monument," the Inspector thought with sudden savage irritation and nearly ricked his neck in an effort to see round the bend in the path.

The footsteps ceased.

A sudden murmuring and rustling began among the trees. Mannix raised one hand slightly; at once the sound and movement ended.

In the ensuing moment of silence Frank appeared, and the Inspector winced to see him.

He had once arrested a convict on the run, but had seldom seen any man in so desperate a case as the youth who now swayed before him.

Frank's face was deathly pale, his lips twitched and fluttered, and his eyes moved restlessly from side to side, as if reluctant to face anything that they saw.

Fear had destroyed him, and his physical collapse was so nearly complete that his body slumped, shapeless as a half-filled sack, and his legs buckled beneath him.

He shambled forward with hanging head until he stood some ten paces from the two men. They could hear his painful, sobbing breath and even, it seemed, the racing flutter of his heart.

"I got your message," he said dully. "I got your message and I came like you said."

The Inspector rose quickly to his feet and laid a hand upon Frank's shoulder, mechanically uttering the words of the cautionary formula.

His touch roused Frank to sudden violence. His strength was surprising, but he could not break Rosewarne's practised hold.

Mannix sat silent and his very impassivity seemed to goad the boy to fury.

He began to shriek at the tobacco man, words and curses tumbling from his white and twisted lips.

"Nark!" he screamed. "Bleeding informer. You shopped me, didn't you? Turned me out and put me on the run and then shopped me to the cops for that Woolwich job. What are you getting out of it? Not the money me and Jackie took—you'll never get that, I'll lay. What did you want out of it, then, you dirty, double-crossing swine? Answer me that."

Rosewarne was using all his strength now to hold the struggling boy, and he looked up with relief when a constable came running towards him.

Meanwhile Frank continued to shout. He was mocking the

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old man and his voice was cracked and ugly. "Did you fancy yourself doing the world a favour, then? Putting all the bad boys in prison so they couldn't do no more harm?"

He was beside himself with misery, and nothing would stop the words he had to say. "I know what it is. You want me to tell your copper friend that Jackie didn't kill the watchman. Is that what you want? Tell 'im it was me, shall I? Shall I do that, is that what you want?"

He twisted round until he faced Rosewarne. "Did you hear that, copper? It was me that did it. Me, with my little gun—not Jackie. It was me, me, me! Go on, then, hang me—what you waiting for? Take me away and hang me." He began to weep noisily.

Mannix had let his head sink forward on his breast, but now he raised it and looked at Rosewarne. "Do you want any more?" he asked in a voice of unutterable weariness. "Go ahead, Inspector. Do your duty. Defend the children of the poor. If you can."

Rosewarne did not look at him. The constable had joined him, and between them, almost gently, they led Frank away. Mannix could still hear the boy's convulsive sobbing as they left the park.

Mannix remained seated upon the bench as if there were more to come.

He stared hard at the ground and his lips moved silently. Jacob Mannix was counting the minutes. Ten passed by, and he looked up to find the Dude standing before him.

The youth wore a fine gaberdine coat over his smart suit, and his crisply curling hair was sprinkled with raindrops shaken from the trees. He looked fresh and buoyant.

"There's been an accident," he announced cheerfully.

"How bad was it?" asked Mannix sharply.

"Pretty bad. Quite a nice-looking young fellow, too. Mind, between you and me, I think he was in a bit of trouble because he seemed to be trying to get away from a busy and a D. in plain clothes. All over in a minute it was—dashed into the road and along comes a car and knocks him down. Seemed to come from nowhere it did, almost as if it had been arranged special for the purpose. Driver was most upset, of course, but there, these things will happen."

The Dude began to whistle a dance tune.

Mannix looked at him heavily for a moment and the bounce went out of the boy.

"Frank's dead," he said sullenly. "I didn't mean no harm."

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" Nobody ever means any harm if you can believe them," said Mannix. " These things just happen, as you so wisely remark. But they do not happen only by chance, and they serve in this case to keep the balance between justice and mercy, and they protect my customers."

The Dude looked at him warily. " That was what it was for, then? "

" You never guessed? "

" I obey orders."

" As you should, my boy, as you should. It occurred to me that our late friend Frank might be made an example to other people not to be foolish, or false, or untrustworthy."

The Dude shook his head. " I don't get it. Why all the palaver? Couldn't you just have slipped the good word to the cops and left it to them? Why the accident at the end? "

" The oldest reason in the world, and the best. Dead men don't talk, you can rely on it."

The Dude shuffled his feet.

" This one did," he said nervously.

" What do you mean? "

" What I say. Frank took a minute or two to die and he mumbled something to the D., Rosewarne. I wasn't close enough to hear what he said, but I can guess."

Mannix had gone grey in the face. " A man does not lie in the face of death," he repeated softly.

" Sounds like a quotation."

The tobacco man nodded. " You might call it that," he said in the same quiet voice.

The boy moved restlessly, anxious to be away. " Reckon I'll be getting along then," he said.

Mannix looked at him malevolently. " I reckon you will," he said. " But just listen to one thing before you go, my boy. About accidents. They happen to us all and they can happen very easily to you. It would be well to bear that always in mind. Now you can run away to your hiding-place, for I am going to be busy and you will not like the company I shall keep."

The Dude walked off hurriedly. He looked puzzled still and in his heart he carried the small beginning of fear.

Mannix watched him out of sight before thrusting a hand inside his greatcoat and pulling out a number of untidy parcels wrapped in newspaper. He unwrapped and arranged the smaller ones by his side, in his usual way, and spread the morning paper across his knees.

Setting the pile of tobacco upon the pictured face of the dead fugitive, he began once more to make his cigarettes. Pick and

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tease and tear, lay the damp to one side, roll and fold and tap.

He was still at work when the squad car came for him. For the game was played out, the cards stacked away, and the gamblers ready to go. Frank had talked before he died, and Rosewarne had picked up the final trick.

★ ★ ★

ANSWERS to WARDING THEM OFF

on page 39

1. *Sarah Gamp or Betsey Prig, in "Martin Chuzzlewit," by Charles Dickens.*
2. *Dr. Jekyll, in "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," by R. L. Stevenson.*
3. *Yram, in Samuel Butler's "Erewhon."*
4. *Grimsdyke, in "Doctor in the House," by Richard Gordon.*
5. *Catherine Barkley, in "A Farewell to Arms," by Ernest Hemingway.*
6. *The Doctor, in Shakespeare's "Macbeth."*
7. *Karshish, in Robert Browning's "An Epistle containing the Strange Medical Experience of Karshish, the Arab Physician."*
8. *The Doctour of Phisik, in Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales."*

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD No. 22

We are pleased to announce the five winners of Argosy's twenty-second Prize Crossword Competition:—

M. Austen Esq., Horbury Crescent, London, W.11.

Mrs. M. Best, South Street, St. Austell, Cornwall.

N. W. Broadhurst Esq., Arlington Road, Eastbourne, Sussex.

E. H. Onions Esq., Ideal Buildings, Kidderminster, Worcs.

A. J. Pearson Esq., Downs Park East, Westbury Park, Bristol.

These readers who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Spruce.* 4, *Turnpike.* 9, *Ranker.* 10, *Alarmist.* 11, *Creation.* 13, *Solder.* 15, *Oust.* 16, *Act the fool.* 19, *Topgallant.* 20, *Lisp.* 23, *Agenda.* 25, *Acid test.* 27, *Outstrip.* 28, *Course.* 29, *Martinet.* 30, *Strewn.*

Down. 1, *Sirocco.* 2, *Runners-up.* 3, *Crests.* 5, *Ugly.* 6, *Narrower.* 7, *Iliad.* 8, *Enthral.* 12, *Occult.* 14, *Ethnic.* 17, *Olive tree.* 18, *Banditti.* 19, *Tea-room.* 21, *Pattern.* 22, *Adroit.* 24, *Enter.* 26, *Fine.*

IN NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY
an exciting story by NIGEL BALCHIN and
another intriguing SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE

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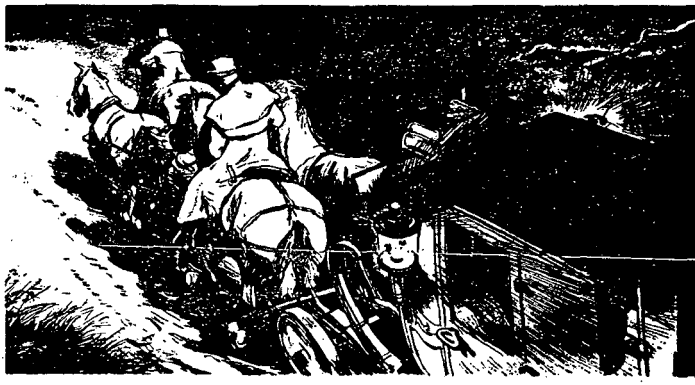
★ *Summer, 1805. At Boulogne, excitement rises to fever pitch: Napoleon's massed army awaits the order to invade Britain. Panic stalks through the camp as sentry after sentry is murdered. The cunning Minister of Police, Joseph Fouché, believes the ghost killer, "Captain Cut-throat," to be a British spy.*

Held prisoner by Fouché in the notorious Room of Mirrors is the elegant "Vicomte de Bergerac," whom Fouché has unmasked as a young Scots nobleman, Alan Hepburn, agent of the British Foreign Office. Alan's lovely French wife, Madeleine, whom he had deserted on being warned that she was a French spy, is also in Fouché's clutches, suspected by him of being a British agent. Fouché reveals Alan's presence to Madeleine, and warns her that her husband has one chance to save his life: he must discover the identity of Captain Cut-throat.

Alan is confronted by the voluptuous and passionate Ida de Sainte-Elme, who, while Alan's mistress, had betrayed him to Fouché. Fouché's secretary follows her into the Room of Mirrors and in a mad access of jealousy tries to shoot her. The shot summons Hans Schneider, an arrogant officer of the Hussars of Bercy whose hot temper and haughty disposition has almost caused the death of a grenadier at Boulogne; and Captain Guy Mercier of the Mounted Guides.

Lieutenant Schneider viciously turns on the unarmed prisoner. Mercier offers Alan his own weapon. In the act of drawing, both men are interrupted by Fouché, who, dismissing the others, reveals to Alan his wife's danger. Alan agrees to go to Boulogne. Fouché departs. A panel in the mirror wall opens, and Alan turns to face the lovely young wife whom he has not seen since he abandoned her . . .

the story continues



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BLACK SABRE

by

JOHN DICKSON CARR

STILL the seconds went by, and Alan did not speak. When he looked down at her, after all that long separation, the emotion he felt was one of greater tenderness.

"Alan," Madeleine said in a whisper. A passion of sincerity consumed her and shone in her eyes. "Alan, there's something I want to tell you. Please! Listen!—You're going on this mission for my sake, aren't you?"

Silence. Alan backed against the table. He could not have expressed the horror he felt to hear this.

"No!" he said. "You don't understand! That wasn't the reason at all! The real reason—I can't tell you!"

Madeleine ran forward, and then stopped when they were a few feet apart. "Listen!" she said. "They say they'll kill us both if you refuse to give up your country and serve them instead. If you are doing this for my sake, and you detest doing it as much as I think you do, then tell them to go on and kill us and get it over! At least I can prove I didn't marry you to spy on you! Tell

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them to kill us, Alan! *But don't do what they ask you!*" Ironically, these very words of hers created for him a new quandary and a worse difficulty.

He did not touch her, much as he wished to do so. A brief time longer he studied her: the blue eyes, wide-spaced, the short straight nose, the smooth-gleaming shoulders rising high from the bodice of a grey silk gown.

Then he turned his back on her, and walked to the other side of the Room of Mirrors.

The Minister of Police, Joseph Fouché, consulted his watch. "It is now," he said, "half past eleven. At one o'clock in the morning a special post-chaise departs from here for Boulogne: to be exact, for the village of Pont-de-Briques just outside the camp. This diligence, drawn by four horses, will contain four passengers. With a change of horses every four or five leagues, it should achieve a remarkable speed, and reach Boulogne before dusk tomorrow evening. Certainly it should be there before midnight. Your destination will be a small château in the Park of Thirty Statues reserved for visitors of importance and until recently, occupied by the American envoy, Monsieur Hopewell.

"The four passengers will be Monsieur Hepburn and his wife; you, Madame de Sainte-Elme, and you, Captain Mercier. Following the post-chaise on horseback, at a discreet distance but completely unknown to either of the Hepburns, will be Lieutenant Schneider." Round the little group that listened avidly to him, there ran a pulse of emotion very different in each of them.

Captain Guy Mercier and Hans Schneider occupied two chairs that had been drawn up to the Minister's desk. Madame de Sainte-Elme stood by the door of the ante-room.

Lieutenant Schneider, his cold countenance alight with pleasure, sat bolt upright on the edge of his chair: his heavy scabbard lay propped on the floor, his freckled left hand gripped hard round the pommel of the sabre. "I also, of course," demanded Schneider, "shall have a change of horses at every posting-station?"

"Of course. But you will take care that in no circumstances are you seen by Monsieur Hepburn." The puppet-master tapped a bony finger on his desk. "You all apprehend, I hope, the necessity for these precautions?"

Schneider merely fondled the sabre-hilt and smiled to himself. But Captain Guy Mercier was fast losing that air of lightness and tolerance with which he preferred to face the world.

"At the same time," added Fouché, with another sharp rap on the desk, "I am sending to this camp a British agent and his woman confederate. This pleases me very much. But there must be no possibility that either of them, at any time or in any way, can send out a message as to what is happening there. You, Mercier, will be responsible for the man Hepburn. You will be with him day and night. You will be at his side in the camp and out of it, while Lieutenant Schneider follows at a distance and covers both of you."

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" Surely, sir, the presence of Hepburn will be conspicuous? "

" On the contrary. He is known as the Vicomte de Bergerac. His arrest has been kept a secret, and he will continue to use that name. He was decorated by the Emperor, though by proxy and not in person, for winning prizes in the fencing and riding competitions—and it will seem only natural for him to be seeking military preferment. As for Lieutenant Schneider here, do you imagine *he* was sent from Boulogne merely to carry a dispatch? There is a reason why this officer carries himself with a certain air, and imagines everyone should know his name wherever he goes. Lieutenant Schneider," said Fouché, " is the best swordsman in the Grand Army." Ida de Sainte-Elme, standing by the door, gave a gasp but did not speak.

Schneider, with a tight and complacent little smile, turned his head and surveyed Captain Mercier. Mercier returned the look. There was no love in it at all.

" I do not anticipate," said Fouché, " that the man Hepburn will try to escape. However, should he attempt to do so—"

Schneider smiled again.

" Should he attempt to do so," repeated Fouché, giving Schneider a withering glare, " you will disarm or disable him without killing him. This man is not to die until *I* say so. Is that clear? "

In none of the looks that Schneider had been giving Fouché was there any love, either. Now, tense of face, Schneider managed a curt nod and looked away.

" From the moment the coach leaves here tonight," said Fouché, " you and Captain Mercier are responsible for this man both to me and to the Emperor. Remember it! "

Here the Minister of Police's gaze moved across the room and grew agreeable.

" You, Madame de Sainte-Elme," he added, " will of course be responsible for cherishing the woman. Do I make this clear, madame? For the next five days you will be closer to Madeleine Hepburn than a sister; you will even do your best to win her confidence."

Ida flung forward. She pressed herself against the Minister's desk, leaning her weight on the top with both hands, and looking at him with the light of the solitary candle illuminating her inspired face. " What, precisely, is behind all this? " she cried out. " And what double-faced game are you playing *now*? "

Up went the red eyebrows. " I fail to understand you, madame."

" Attend to me, dear Minister! Does the Emperor know that your agent to Boulogne, your alleged Vicomte de Bergerac, is really a condemned Englishman? "

" No, he does not. His Majesty is much too impatient. When he discovers a spy, he wastes good material and has the fellow shot immediately."

" Ah, I thought so! "

" Meaning, madame? "

" The Emperor, you tell us," said Ida, " calls for a secret agent

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to find Captain Cut-throat and gives you only seven days to accomplish it. Yet you waste two of these days persuading a rebellious man who may fail after all! I'll not even mention your apparent insanity in deliberately opening the gates of Boulogne to a British spy. No, I'll not mention that! But would you dare risk your own position by entrusting this mission to a solitary agent, an unwilling agent, a man who might hand us all over to the English? Would you dare risk that, Minister, unless . . ."

"Unless what?"

"Unless behind it you had some twisted plot of your own?"

This time it was Lieutenant Schneider who sprang to his feet, but nobody noticed him.

"I cannot fathom what it is!" persisted Ida, groping for inspiration with her hands at her temples.

"If you could, dear lady, you would be as successful as Joseph Fouché. There is no such plot. If there were, and in the unlikely event that you could fathom it . . ."

"Oh, I know how to be silent! I have certain plans of my own, and I shan't pry into your conduct if you don't pry into mine. Sacré nom, Minister, how I could make you writhe if I could only discover your scheme! In sending Alan against such impossible odds, it would almost seem—"

Suddenly Ida became transfigured. "You don't intend him to succeed, do you?" she burst out. "You think he can't possibly find Captain Cut-throat! Answer me one question, sweet Minister: what chance does he have to save his life?"

"In candour, madame, very little indeed."

The eerie noise that jabbed at them then, thin and shrill and strangely inhuman, was in fact one of the speaking-tubes whistling through its perforated mouthpiece as someone frantically blew into it from the other end. It whistled, gasped, and whistled again with increasing urgency. Ida and Mercier had jumped at the first sound; Fouché and Schneider remained unperturbed. But all four looked towards the ante-room, where a candle burnt steadily below the portrait of the all-conquering Emperor.

"I would wager you," declared Ida, sweetly, "that you are hearing the speaking-tube from the Room of Mirrors. You had better answer it, dear Minister. Perhaps the prisoner has notions you have not even fathomed yourself."

At the other side of the Room of Mirrors Alan faced Madeleine, leaning casually against the wall near one of the gilded wooden satyr-faces. Hitherto, Madeleine had spoken in English, because they had always spoken English in the past. But Alan addressed her in French. "Madeleine," he said, "how is your mother?"

It was as though he had hit her in the face.

Passionately she meant every word she had said about dying with him, and had thought he would understand. But now . . .

"Then the culprit, it seems," said Madeleine, pressing a hand against her breast, "is not to be given a hearing after all."

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Despite herself, and to her horror, tears stung into her eyes. "The French are quite convinced I'm a British spy," she said. "And you, all this time, have been thinking I was in the pay of the French! *I*, of all people! It would be comical if it weren't so horribly ironic!"

Alan did not move. "Since we can't speak of anything else without being overheard," he said, "let us at least speak of the old days in London. Madeleine, how is your mother?"

There was no very strong emphasis on those last words, not even a raising of the voice. But Madeleine, catching his eye, stopped abruptly in the very act of speaking.

What stopped her was not even a tone, a warning, an inflection; it was that eerie emotion-transference that can be known fully only to those who, however bitterly they misunderstand each other's motives because they are in love, can sense each shading of the other's mood.

Madeleine, with a shock at her heart, flung the tears out of her eyes. "My—my mother is well," she answered, instantly following his lead.

"Does she still pursue all her charitable works, my dear, and still instruct pupils, as you used to do, in Dr. Braidwood's school at Hackney?"

"Yes, though that c-can't go on for long. Dr. Braidwood is growing very old."

"That's a pity," said Alan. "It's a great pity!"

Alan's left hand was hooked in his waistcoat pocket. Raising his right hand carelessly, fingers upwards and thumb across the palm, he folded the fingers downwards and then made a careless gesture sideways with forefinger out and three fingers folded under.

Beneath the steady gaze of Sergeant Benet and Corporal Chavasse, whose eyes Madeleine could see glistening at spy-holes behind two of the gilded satyr-faces, Alan had formed the letters B, E, and G in Dr. Braidwood's manual alphabet for the deaf and dumb.

"But my heart is too heavy," Alan went on, in a voice that seemed to ring with uncanny loudness, "to go on discussing happier times than these. Believe me, Madeleine, I understand your generosity and I appreciate its motive."

BEGMEG—

If done slowly and with gestures, that deaf-and-dumb alphabet was completely undetectable to the probing eyes outside.

"All the same, my dear," continued Alan, striding to another side of the room, taking out his watch, and consulting it, "we should only be idiotic and futile to obstruct the Minister of Police any longer. I was given until tomorrow morning to make up my mind, and I—I have put off the decision almost too long."

BEGMEGOBOU . . .

For an instant Madeleine herself imagined that she had been dreaming all this; that the words were gibberish or that he was not even signalling at all. Then the mute syllables flashed out in recognizable English: BEG ME GO BOULOGNE.

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"We must think of ourselves, my dear," persisted Alan, replacing the watch in his pocket and continuing to pace. "We must consider the safe and prudent course for both of us. I have no choice in the matter now; and neither, believe me, have you. The safe and prudent course is wisest in the end."

Bang went the book, down on the table, while Alan paced, and the mute language flowed on.

"It should be evident, by this time—" BEG ME GO BOULOGNE. ALL PART OF MY PLAN.

She did not clearly hear the words he was uttering aloud, like a man whipped and hunted to the end of his courage. When he paused, she made a plea of her own, urging him to be sensible and obey Fouché. And, all this time, Madeleine's thoughts ran riot.

Well, then, Alan had meant to obey Fouché from the very first! If he feared anything, he had feared only that his pretence of reluctance might have been kept up until it was too late, and he would be shot instead. But, if he wanted to go, it could only be because he was using this mission as a pretext to hide . . .

As though Alan were reading her thoughts, the deaf-and-dumb alphabet flashed back. ONLY WAY ENTER CAMP. MUST LEARN BONEY'S PLANS.

The implications of this, and all the new dangers it opened, boiled up in Madeleine so that she could hardly hide her own feelings. Turning away from him, more than ever conscious of the staring eyes from the wall, Madeleine threw her shawl on the table and pressed her hands together.

Then Alan's voice struck through her thoughts. "Did you hear what I said, Madeleine?"

Conscious of an alteration in his tone, she looked at him quickly. He regarded her with the old twinkle in his eye and the old amiable expression, quickly veiled. She felt he had never been so much master of the game as when he seemed beaten and in a corner.

She understood the alteration in his tone. He was not talking for effect on the listeners outside. His face had darkened and there was fierce sincerity in every word.

"You need have no fear, I tell you! You were impressed into this accursed business through my fault and mine alone . . ."

"I don't care, Alan! I prefer it so!"

"But I care. I will make some bargain with the Father of Lies upstairs, and he'll set you free as soon as it can be managed."

"You can't, Alan! And you mustn't!"

"Why not?"

"In the first place, he would never believe you! In the second place . . ." What Madeleine wanted to say was that in some fashion she meant to help him.

"In the second place," she continued, "at least we can be together. They are sending me to Boulogne with you. Did you know that?" Plainly, as she saw by his expression, he had not known it. He drew back a little, poised: his eyes roving and his mind sorting thoughts.

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"Ah, so that's it," he said softly. "That explains much I ought to have interpreted before this! *That's* why Ida de Sainte-Elme was here tonight."

Alan, deep in mazy thought, had drawn back still more. His eyes were fixed on the crown of candles hanging from the ceiling, the candles flaring low in broad winding-sheets of grease and dripping hot wax on the tabletop beneath.

And Alan nodded: "The semaphore-lamps burn late tonight," he said. "A message has already gone out to General Duroc at Pont-de-Briques. A coach leaves here at one o'clock. If Fouché insists on sending you to Pont-de-Briques, it can only mean Ida de Sainte-Elme is going as well."

He faced her fully; he struck the table; a full-blown bitterness flared out.

"And I very much fear," he said, "that you and I—we shall not be together after all."

Madeleine moistened dry lips. "Do you mean to imply," she cried, "that you will be with *her* instead? Your latest mistress?"

They looked at each other. Spectres of old days, of white-faced suspicions and misunderstandings, crowded round and troubled the air even now.

"Listen to me!" said Alan. "I merely mean that she is under orders to watch you as Mercier is to watch me. But, whatever happens or seems to happen in the future, will you promise me to be as civil to this woman as though she were your closest friend? Can you promise that?"

"Alan, I know what you're doing! You—you may even make love with her while I'm there, if there is any possible good reason for it!"

"There is the very best reason in the world. For I tell you this, without any exaggeration at all: that the future of several countries for the next fifty years may depend on what can be discovered at Boulogne in the next few days."

"And—and this Captain Cut-throat? You intend to find him too?" In her excitement Madeleine did not notice the slipping-out of that dangerous word "too." Fortunately, it seemed, neither of the wall listeners noticed it, either.

"That is what I am pledged to do," retorted Alan, giving her a glance that shocked her back to alertness, "and, what is more, to find Captain Cut-throat before there can be another murder."

"But that's impossible!"

"The choice," he answered, "is not nearly so wide as you think. Nor is the assassin's method at all mysterious."

In the pause that Alan deliberately allowed, both of them became intensely aware of those two other presences, Sergeant Benet and Corporal Chavasse, listening and listening as though with stopped breath.

There was a gulping, strangling noise of breath released. Then one of the gilded satyr-faces flashed into witlessness as a pair of eyes disappeared from behind it. Somebody stumbled in the

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corridor outside. They heard the frantic whistle of a speaking-tube, summoning the Minister of Police to come and listen to a prisoner suddenly grown garrulous.

Alan, as urbane as Fouché himself, removed his gaze from the mirrored reflection of that satyr-face. Taking the watch out of his waistcoat-pocket, he opened its lid, glanced at it, shut it up, and replaced it. "The way in which that sentry was really killed in a lighted space—" he began.

A speaking-tube whistled again. The time was just ten minutes to twelve on the night of Monday, the 22nd of August.

Tuesday, August 23rd. A quarter to nine in the evening, with a lurid yellowish sky fading to ghostly twilight over the heights of the Forest of Hardelot far ahead.

Crack went the whip of the leading postilion, plied ever more freely as the coach, built high off the ground with large back wheels and smaller front wheels, rolled at a faster pace along the Emperor's new military road.

Drawn by four horses with two postilions up, it had clattered through Amiens at mid morning; through Abbeville and Etaples; and now, in the twilight, it was on a straight run of a league and a half to its destination at Pont-de-Briques outside Boulogne.

A cleaner, fresher wind from the sea stirred through groves of spruce and fir and pine. The air was pine-scented and aromatic; it cooled hot foreheads inside the coach as one of the four passengers —he wore dusty day-clothes of blue coat and buff waistcoat above white doeskin breeches and black top-boots—made the first remark for some time.

"Well," began Alan Hepburn, "if you would care. . ."

Alan, sitting with his back to the horses and with a leather-covered box across his knees, paused to glance first at Captain Mercier seated beside him at his right hand. Then he looked across at Madeleine and at Ida de Sainte-Elme.

Nearly nineteen hours of continuous bone-jolting over bad and dusty roads, with brief halts only for changes of horses or for what scanty meals could be obtained, are not conducive to good spirits at the best of times.

When these travellers had left Paris at two o'clock in the morning instead of one, rumbling out under the Porte Saint-Denis with the glow of their own carriage-lamps reflected through the windows on claret-coloured upholstery, more than one condition of nerves was already manifest. Guy Mercier, with a deprecating grimace, had propped a sabre upright in the corner beside his busby, and put down a loaded pistol on the cushion at his right hand.

"Is it any use for me to assure you, Captain Mercier," said Alan, "that I have no intention of trying to escape? Would you accept my word of parole?"

"*I* should accept it, readily. But I am answerable to the Minister of Police and that is a different matter. Not that I object to remaining awake all night . . ."

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" Keeping awake tonight? After you have just ridden post-horses more than fifty leagues from Boulogne? "

" So far as I am concerned, only until we arrive at Pont-de-Briques. After that, the matter arranges itself—"

Here Mercier reached down beside him and tapped his sabre-tache, the flat leather pouch which swung low from the left hip of every cavalry officer.

" Every night," he repeated, tapping the pouch, " I am to give you sufficient laudanum to keep you asleep for seven or eight hours at least. You are carrying a pass, Monsieur Hepburn, signed by General Savary, which allows you to go anywhere inside the Boulogne Camp during the day. But every night, by instructions from Papa Fouché, there must be no chance of your wandering about the camp in the dark hours."

" But that's not necessary, I tell you! "

" Why do you object? "

" Captain Mercier, there are more reasons than you . . ."

" Listen! " interrupted Madeleine, who had raised her head. " Don't you hear hoofbeats following this coach now? Isn't there some horseman after us? "

Ida laughed and affectionately patted Madeleine's hand. " Even if there were, we could not hear it through all the noise of this diligence."

There was some truth in what she said. The coach, flying out through the suburbs of Paris, crashed and swayed on creaky springs. Two portmanteaux as well as a wooden hatbox bumped about on the roof together with the other luggage and Mercier's saddle, sliding from side to side like loose cargo in a ship's hold.

But Captain Mercier's attention would not be distracted. " There is a further consideration, my friend," he said. " When we reach Pont-de-Briques, you will be posing as the Vicomte de Bergerac. Can you guess how much your life would be worth if the Emperor should discover who you really are? "

" Frankly," confessed Alan, " I have once or twice wondered if the discovery might not perhaps annoy him."

" Annoy him? Monsieur Hepburn, you would not live a quarter of an hour—neither, I regret to say, would your wife—should the Emperor learn the true identity of either one of you."

Madeleine Hepburn glanced quickly round at Ida de Sainte-Elme. Ida, with a quiet and satisfied smile, looked fixedly ahead.

" But don't misunderstand me, Madame Hepburn," urged Mercier, instantly contrite. " I have no wish to alarm you. I meant only to warn your husband against his own recklessness. After all, it is certain that neither Madame de Sainte-Elme or I would ever give you away."

" And why is that so certain? " cried Ida.

" If for no other consideration, dear lady, because we dare not. We have put our own lives in hazard by accepting these orders from Papa Fouché; he knows it; we must protect our two hostages in order to protect ourselves. This is an unpleasant mission and

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an unpleasant journey for all of us; but we must at least try to make it as agreeable as we can."

Out of the gloom, honey-sweet and charged with yearning, rose the voice of Ida de Sainte-Elme. "Yes, yes, yes! That is true and it *must* be done! Captain Mercier?"

"Madame?" said Mercier, jumping a little in spite of himself.

Ida, who was seated opposite Mercier, leaned forward with her knees almost touching his, and her intent face upturned. Alan, seated opposite Madeleine, exchanged a quick glance with her. But, ever since meeting Ida, Madeleine had been as eager and wide-eyed and innocent-seeming as a girl of eighteen.

"This wretched affair," pursued Ida, "will drive us all to distraction and leave us not a second's peace of mind. But only you, Captain Mercier, have had the good sense and the good heart to recognize that."

"Come, madame makes too much of a trifle," protested Mercier, and laughed rather self-consciously. "When I recall that a few days ago, I was picturing just such a scene as this . . ."

"But I don't quite understand, Captain Mercier. You imagined," and affectionately Ida touched Madeleine, who beamed back at her, "you imagined *us* together?"

"Not you two ladies in particular, naturally. Still, when I thought of just such a situation as this, and in my innocence believed I should enjoy taking part in it!"

"Oh, really? And *don't* you enjoy it at all, dear Captain?"

"With you here, madame, enjoyment is inevitable."

You're damned well right, thought Alan Hepburn; and through what devious labyrinth of treachery, he wondered, was Ida squirming and writhing at the present moment?

By every law of poetic justice, reflected Alan, Ida de Sainte-Elme should have been the wife of Joseph Fouché. For all his withered looks, the Minister of Police was only forty-two years old. Whereas Fouché's real wife was a dusty, ugly little woman known to everybody as Bonne Jeanne, who—

Meanwhile, since they had galloped past the last dark windows to throw back reflected gleams of their own coach-lamps, faces faded away against claret-coloured upholstery and the inside of the coach grew dark. The floor jolted and rocked. The rolled-up blinds rattled. But the inside reflector-lamp remained unlit. Feeling Madeleine's gaze steadily on him in the dark, Alan reached out and gripped her hands while desperately he revolved more problems than one.

And still Ida's conversation with Mercier, sinking to intimate whispers, flowed on and on. Ida asked about his past life. Withdrawing a miniature flask from the gold-embroidered reticule hanging on her left arm, she offered him a sip of brandy. She was by turns coy and full-throatedly alluring. If this sort of talk continued all through the night . . .

It did continue for most of the night. But by the next day, when the coach had passed its halfway mark at Amiens, incessant

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jolting and noise and discomfort had brought them all to a pitch of nerves at which anything might have happened.

The lurid afterglow was fading to a ghostly twilight. They were within sight of the Forest of Hardelot. And Alan made up his mind as to the only course he could take. "Well," he began, "if you would care . . ."

Madeleine, wrapped in her dark cambric dust-cloak and with a kerchief over her hair, saw with apprehension that he was pale. Slapping dust from his blue coat and buff waistcoat, he shifted on his knees the flattish wooden box—it was bound in the green-and-gold leather of the Imperial colours—that he had carried all the way from Paris.

"If you would care to hear," continued Alan, "what I have discovered about Captain Cut-throat and how the assassin committed his last murder?"

Crack went the whip of the leading postilion. Madeleine, who had been speculatively studying Ida as though Madeleine too had made up her mind about something, twitched her head round. Alan felt rather than saw Captain Mercier grow tense at his right side.

"Do you mean what you say?" Ida de Sainte-Elme demanded.

"Yes, every word of it."

"As for me," amusedly said Mercier, who was the most hollow-eyed of the four, "I shall believe all this when I hear it. In the Room of Mirrors, you made the same offer. Did you not?"

"Yes."

"And afterwards, when the guards had whistled us all downstairs in a hurry, you calmly refused to say another word. I shall not soon forget Papa Fouché's face at the time. Candidly, now, weren't you deliberately trying to infuriate him and no more?"

"Candidly, yes, I was! Damn it all, could I resist the temptation when it was too late for him to make reprisals?"

"Once again, Monsieur Hepburn," said Mercier, "I must warn you against this line of conduct. You may joke with us; you may even joke with Joseph Fouché; but you joke with the Emperor at your own peril!"

"And who *is* joking with the Emperor? Am I? Listen to me! This decision to keep me quiet with laudanum has altered every move I make. Do you agree that it is vital to stop Captain Cut-throat?"

"Yes, naturally we all agree."

"Well!" said Alan, tapping the box. "This murderer strikes at night, and only at night. With the whole camp in a turmoil, with a campaign looming close, he may strike again at any moment. When that happens, my friend, they will call for the man who was supposed to prevent it. How will *you* explain to the Emperor the fact that I am lying stupefied in a drugged sleep?"

Crack went the postilion's whip.

Mercier, so bemused with Ida that he seemed to have lost the power to think, consulted her face for inspiration and found none.

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Alan was peering round at him. A jolt of the coach threw Madeleine and Ida against each other; they smiled mechanically and hastily drew apart.

"It is a difficulty," admitted Mercier, "but it's no affair of mine! I am acting under orders, on the Minister of Police's responsibility—"

"You think Fouché will accept any responsibility whatever, once all four of us are involved in the same debacle?"

"But what is Fouché trying to do?" cried Madeleine. "Surely he must have foreseen this difficulty himself?"

"Of course he did, Madeleine. He thinks of everything. This is simply part of the web he has spun round you and me—"

"I knew it!" breathed Ida.

"—Because the old fox is sure I can't find a way out of it. Can I persuade you, Captain, that you will hardly aid your investigator if you drug him before he even begins to investigate?"

"My friend, you are very persuasive."

"For pity's sake, Captain, believe me! I was never more sincere in my life!"

"Yet I still tell you," retorted Mercier, "that I cannot do this. But I will forgo the drug for one night more; at least I can keep on my feet to watch over you. Otherwise I am a soldier under orders; I must obey!"

"Tonnerre de dieu!" exclaimed Ida de Sainte-Elme. "That I should be placed in such a position! If I go straight to the Emperor . . ."

"And have Alan immediately shot for espionage?" cried Madeleine. "Try that, Madame de Sainte-Elme, and you may find certain things used against yourself!"

There was a silence.

Alan drew a deep breath. "No," he admitted, "I had not expected you, Mercier, to say anything else. So I must make a final effort to persuade your good sense. I must tell you everything I know about these murders."

Alan opened the box across his knees, took something out of it, and laid it across the lid of the box.

"This," he said, "is the dagger with which the first murder was committed. A sentry, Sapper Robert Duchêne, 3rd Engineers, was stabbed through the back of the neck at the south-west corner of the Field of the Balloons."

It was as though all the stormy perplexities of the Boulogne Camp, hitherto only a confusion of drums and shouting, came near and closed round them at last.

The dagger, carefully cleaned of bloodstains, glistened in the last light from the sky. Its handle was of black polished wood with a plain steel cross-piece. Its blade was flat and straight, some six inches long by an inch and a half broad; it did not even taper until it reached the point, and one edge of the long blade was razor-sharp. Lying against the green-and-gold box-lid, it rattled and quivered with the motion of the coach.

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" Now where the devil," exclaimed the protruding-eyed Mercier, " did you get that dagger? "

" Papa Fouché gave it to me," Alan said simply.

" Fouché? "

" Yes. You have heard one thing, I imagine? In the first three murders, the weapon was left behind in the body of the victim? Very well. As soon as our Father of Lies was told to investigate, he sent a semaphore message for the three daggers and the five scraps of paper signed by Captain Cut-throat. Let's see what he found."

Alan picked up the dagger and handed it to Mercier. " Take a close look at the blade," he suggested.

" But there's nothing here! " protested Mercier, after holding it against the light from the window and tilting it back and forth. " The maker's name has been filed off."

" Yes. Now look at it through a strong crystal lens," said Alan, giving him a lens from the box, " as Fouché naturally and immediately did. Good! You see something, don't you? The maker's name has been filed off, but not so completely erased that it can't be distinguished under scrutiny; and the name is Andrews of Sheffield. All three of those daggers came from England."

" England, eh? " repeated Ida de Sainte-Elme, and drew her lips back in a brilliant smile. " More and more interesting! England! "

" Finally," said Alan, producing his third and last exhibit, " here is one of the notes left by Captain Cut-throat. Do you observe anything odd about this? "

The spots of blood on the paper were only brown and dim in the gloom as Mercier held it up to the window. " Admittedly," said Mercier, " admittedly, we have heard a good deal about these notes from the murderer; but—"

" But," Alan interrupted, " nobody has actually seen them except General Savary's Military Police, who are not famous for their brilliant intellects and are damned lucky if they can read and write at all. Pay no attention to the handwriting; that tells us nothing. Look at the signature itself."

" Just a moment! " Mercier almost shouted, after a long pause. " Give me time to think! This message is signed . . ."

" Yes. It is signed, curiously, as *Captain Cut-the-throat*. But that is a misnomer: no throats were cut in the literal sense. Any Frenchman would simply have written *Captain Cut-throat*. To Fouché's logical mind it meant only one thing: some foreigner, trying too hard to write correct French, had overreached himself and used a phrase that nobody in the Grand Army would ever use. Captain Cut-throat, then, must be an Englishman spreading terror as an agent of Pitt or Castlereagh."

" And it's true, isn't it? " cried Ida.

Alan did not seem to hear. Dropping the exhibits back in the box, he closed it with a snap. " Did you not guess anything of this? " he said. " Fouché asked me, in plain words, if the murderer

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must not obviously be an Englishman . . . You, Madeleine, heard some interesting things from the Minister himself?"

To Madeleine it was as though the presence of Fouché peered in at the coach window like a jack-in-the-box, raising red eyebrows and confronting her as the Minister of Police had done the night before.

"Yes!" Madeleine said in an anguish of bitterness. "He told me the whole story of the murders as though he expected me to understand it. Naturally he did! Since he thought I was a British spy, and that a Frenchwoman ought to have seen the point about the mistake in grammar, of course he expected me to understand!"

"Did he *say* that nobody in the Grand Army would ever have written 'Captain Cut-the-throat?'"

"Yes! He said it and he even stressed it, and pointedly asked if it didn't mean something to me."

Madeleine was in a quiet rage at having to admit this before Ida de Sainte-Elme. "Then, of course," she added, "when I said Captain Cut-throat must be a highly placed member of a French secret society called the Olympians, he assumed I was deliberately misleading him . . ."

"In short," interrupted Ida de Sainte-Elme, with a sudden snap, "that you were the innocent-looking, sweet-voiced, and accomplished liar you actually are?"

Madeleine flung her head round. "Take care, madame!" she said. "The Minister of Police is one thing. But if you think I am afraid of *you* . . ."

"Now, one moment!" urged Mercier, waving his hands. "How long has Fouché known or believed the murderer must be an Englishman?"

"Since the evening of the 21st, at least, when the notes and the daggers came into his hands. Yesterday morning he sent a long dispatch by special courier to Savary and the Emperor. It must have arrived at Boulogne well before the time we were leaving Paris."

"But, sacré nom," exclaimed Mercier, "Savary and the Emperor are not still keeping the whole affair a secret? To our troops this knowledge will mean everything. The news that Captain Cut-throat is not one of their own comrades, but a hidden British spy they can find and tear in pieces, will lift their morale to the skies again! Surely the Emperor must immediately publish it?"

"I have no doubt he already has," returned Alan dryly, "and that we shall run full-tilt into its effects very soon. That's why I must take immediate steps to disprove it."

"To disprove it? Are you mad?"

"No."

"But why disprove it?"

"Because I don't believe a word of it," said Alan. "I maintain, just as Madeleine says, that Captain Cut-throat is the head of a revolutionary secret society called the Olympians—whose symbol, by the way, is a blood-stained dagger. I further maintain that

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Captain Cut-throat hired a certain person to do the killings for him. And I am prepared at this instant to give the name of the hired killer."

In the excitement of those hurtling words, both he and Mercier were partly standing up. Now they staggered at a jolt of the coach, and nearly fell.

"*Ohé!*" screamed out a youthful voice from a little way outside. "*Holà! Stand fast! Pull up!*"

In a snorting of horses and a swaying of wheels, the coach bumped and slowed down with an abruptness that flung them all together. As the youthful voice cried out again, they came to a dead stop in the twilight.

Guy Mercier instantly snatched up the loaded pistol that lay on the cushion at his right hand.

Suddenly, they were all aware of the loneliness and emptiness of the countryside at nightfall. Mercier, in his dust-spattered green coat with the single gold epaulet, was leaning out of the off window. Alan had quickly twisted to his own left: head up, intently listening.

"What is it?" Mercier called out of the window. "What's wrong?"

"Wrong, Captain?" yelled back the youthful voice of Michel, the postilion.

"Yes! Why are we stopping?"

"Nothing's wrong, Captain," jeered Michel, giving him a reluctant military salute. "Got to light the lamps, haven't I?" He produced a tinder-box and waved it. "'Tisn't quite dark yet, maybe, but we're on the edge of the Forest of Hardelot and it'll be very dark in *there*."

"And that's what all the fuss was about, then? Couldn't you—"

Alan Hepburn, moving very quickly, slipped open the opposite door of the coach and sprang down outside.

Instantly there was a click as Mercier drew back the hammer of the pistol and whirled round to cover him. "No," said Mercier flatly, "don't try that! Come back in here!"

Alan, who had not moved after his jump, was standing beside the door, with the floor of the coach as high as his waist, staring straight ahead up the road. He replied only when Mercier had repeated the order.

"After all I have just told you," said Alan, turning an exasperated face to him, "do you still think I am trying to escape? If I had wanted to do you any harm, couldn't I have killed you with that dagger a hundred times during the night? No, all of you, listen for a minute!"

He lifted his hand and held it there, intently. In the ensuing silence a light wind whispered at a conference of leaves, and a moist night fragrance breathed up from soil and trees.

"There *is* a horseman following us," Madeleine said quietly. "He's been following us all night and all day. The sound stopped just now, but I'm sure of it."

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" That may be true," said Alan, on an edge of nervous impatience. " But I was thinking . . ."

" Of what? "

" Of someone ahead of us. The road through the forest throws the noise back like a tunnel; it sounds like another coach or carriage, with a cavalry escort. Now who would be going to Boulogne, with a cavalry escort, at this particular time? " Alan stared round. " Where's the expert in these matters? Michel! Hoy, Michel! "

" Sir? "

" Is that what it is, Michel? Another coach with a cavalry escort? "

Since Michel had been trying to show off in front of the women by leaping dramatically on each front axle to kindle the wicks of the brass-bound coach-lamps, and resented his performance going unnoticed, he made quite a show of answering Alan's question.

" It's a light carriage," he screeched, after running into the forest to listen, and running back again, " but not many cavalry—four or six heavy 'uns, maybe—going at a quick trot."

" Can you overtake and pass them, do you think, without giving any offence or having them block the road? "

" Ho! "

Alan nodded, and a coin spun from his hand. Soft yellow light, shining out from a square lamp on either side of the coach, flashed on a new-minted gold napoleon as Michel caught it. Paralysed at such generosity, he clutched the coin in one hand and the tinder-box in the other.

" Sir! " croaked Michel, and added a fervent string of obscenities to show his gratitude. " Would you like me, perhaps, to light the reflector-lamp in this old salad-basket? "

" A reflector-lamp, is it? " asked Alan, craning round and peering up inside the coach. " Yes, so it is. That's most appropriate. A good idea, Michel: light it! In you go, then."

" By the so-and-so of Saint So-and-so," swore Michel, jumping down beside Alan in a puff and swirl of white dust, " I'll never forget you for this. It's almost as good as winning the Emperor's reward for Captain Cut-throat."

" The Emperor's reward for Captain Cut-throat? " repeated Mercier, appearing suddenly at the open door on Alan's side. " What's that? "

Michel stared at him. " It was published last night."

" Yes, but we've just come from Paris. What do you mean by the Emperor's reward for Captain Cut-throat? "

Michel looked at all of them: but especially at Madeleine leaning forward, and at the suspicious, dark-eyed face of Ida de Sainte-Elme beyond. Then, drawing himself up, he made the most of the opportunity.

" *By order of the Emperor!* " shrilled Michel, at attention. " ' To any man or boy in the five corps of the Invasion Army, below the rank of a field-officer, bringing to Military-Police Headquarters,

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alive, the person of the criminal known as Captain Cut-throat, now proved to be an Englishman disguised among you— ' "

Michel's breath soared up and ran out into pantomime for a dozen syllables more; then it caught power in the soaring finale: " '—the sum of one hundred gold napoleons, to be paid immediately, and as much wine or brandy as can be drunk in one night. Signed by me, Savary, Chief of Brigade and Commander of Military Police.' And, by my faith, ladies," added Michel on his own, " the whole camp's gone crazy. They're tearing the place to pieces!"

Nobody spoke.

" I hope you're not a stranger at the camp," bellowed the grateful Michel, with his eyes on Alan's fashionable clothes, " and I hope to so-and-so they know you. I wouldn't like to be the so-and-so they even *suspect* of being Captain Cut-throat."

" Michel," said Alan, with a snap and snarl almost unknown to his nature, " that other carriage is drawing farther and farther ahead of us. You'll lose it altogether if you don't make haste. Whip up your horses and pass them, but don't provoke a quarrel with anybody. Off you go, now! "

Michel kissed his hand to Madeleine and ran. Without a word, Alan swung himself up into the coach; but not before he had intercepted a very curious look, abruptly grown speculative, in the long and languishing eyes of Ida de Sainte-Elme.

The whip cracked with a new fury of energy: the coach, bouncing, gathered speed as the horses smashed into a gallop through the Forest of Hardelot. But Alan, slamming the door and sinking back with the box across his knees, still felt Ida's sharply suspicious gaze.

" Let's forget the Emperor's reward, shall we? " he said. " That gentleman's invariable device, in difficulties, is to distract people's attention and give them something to talk about. After all, couldn't we have expected this? "

" Yet perhaps," said Ida, " it is not alone *his* device. Perhaps others use it, too. What do you think, Alan? "

" Alan was arguing," cried Madeleine, as though by will-power driving and forcing Ida's mind away from something, " that Captain Cut-throat must be the leader of this revolutionary secret society. I don't understand; but I must understand! Go on, Alan! "

" Think for a moment," said Alan, looking from Ida to Mercier, " about the secret society called the Olympians, whose symbol is a blood-stained dagger. Its leader, Captain Cut-throat, employs a hired killer for a series of ghost-murders to spread panic and mutiny. But will he ever allow the world to suspect that his hired killer is a friend, a comrade-in-arms, a member of the Grand Army who sits down at table with them?

" Of course he will not! And that is why I don't believe for an instant in this so-called Englishman; and neither does old Papa Fouché himself. Would any British agent leave behind him *three* daggers, all of them conspicuously of English make, and all with the maker's name not quite scraped off? Would any agent of

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Castlereagh, who must speak French as well as he speaks his own language, make such a blunder as to write, 'Captain Cut-the-throat?' These things were easily perceived because they were meant to be seen. Captain Cut-throat, of necessity, was creating a mythical person to take the blame. Tell me, Mercier, isn't that reasonable?"

"Reasonable as a theory, yes. And no doubt it is very interesting. But, for actual evidence . . ."

"The incriminating evidence," said Alan, "can be found in the last two murders. Will you hear it?"

"Of course!"

"On the night of August 16th, then, Private Felix Saulomon of the 7th Light Infantry was killed not far from the house of Marshal Soult himself. Saulomon was stabbed through the heart from in front, with a straight, horizontal blow, and the weapon was taken away by the murderer.

"Now, Mercier," said Alan, opening the box and again taking out the dagger, "let's suppose you are the assassin who strikes the blows. Imagine you are walking up to your victim. Show me how you would hold this dagger so as to stab any man through the heart in a perfectly straight line. Show me!"

The reflector-lamp, swinging back and forth on the rear wall of the coach, flickered as it swung. Inside the lamp, which was flat and rather small, a candle-flame burnt against a round, concave shield of tin polished as bright as a mirror. The lamp threw a wild, wicked light on the sharp blade of the dagger, and on Guy Mercier as he began to twist his arm into contorted positions.

"But there's something wrong here!" Mercier began. "You can't—"

"No," said Alan. "However you hold it, at least with enough strength for a heart-wound, the line of the blow will never be straight. You can't do it from in front; you can't even do it from the back. Imagine a sentry carrying a large musket on his right shoulder, and try."

"But it *was* done somehow."

"Of course it was. Now look at the blade of the dagger. Does it remind you of anything?"

"In what way?"

"Stop thinking of it as a dagger. Think of the blade and the blade alone. I tell you that as soon as you think clearly of the last murder, inside the fence round the Emperor's pavilion, you will see the whole crude trick in a flash!"

Now, he knew, he had caught Ida's full attention at last.

Desperately he was fighting for that, fighting to hold her attention, fighting to turn her mercurial hatred away from Madeleine and her mercurial suspicions away from himself. And always, with every sense alert, he was listening for the wheels of that other carriage they were pursuing through the echoing forest.

"I ask all of you," said Alan, "as Papa Fouché would ask you, to picture what happened towards midnight, on August 19th, at

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the Emperor's pavilion on the cliff above the Channel. The pavilion itself is dark and deserted. It is a windy night, overcast, with the moon obscured, and the four sentries pacing inside the fence."

"You sound," muttered Ida, "as though you might have been there yourself."

"I was not there, Ida. But the murderer, Captain Cut-throat's hireling, was there. Shall I go on?"

"Yes!"

"Admittedly," said Alan, "it is a lonely and desolate place for those four sentries of the Marine Guard. They are inside an oblong fence of wooden palings built head-high, each man patrolling one side. At short intervals, all the way round inside the fence, hang reflector-lamps to make the place bright. This light, with their own company, is good enough reassurance.

"Grenadier Emile Joyet, it may be, does not feel quite so reassured. He is whistling to keep up his courage; and two of the others are looking at him, because whistling is forbidden on sentry-go. Still, what actually has he to fear? The gate in the fence is locked. This ghost-murderer, with a dagger, cannot climb the fence without being seen and shot; this ghost-murderer cannot even thrust an arm through the narrow spaces between the upright wooden palings.

"Such night fears are childish, unworthy of the Grand Army. As Grenadier Joyet paces towards one end of his beat, nearer and nearer to the north-eastern angle of the fence, he is walking nearer and nearer to death. But he does not know it. He knows he can see every lighted inch inside the fence, and he thinks he can see sufficiently far outside . . ."

Ida could not restrain herself. "He *thinks* he can see outside the fence? But, as I understood it, there was no doubt. The witnesses swore they could see outside. Weren't they telling the truth?"

"No," said Alan, "although they all believed they were telling the truth!"

"Why?"

"Because that is the whole meaning of reflector-lamps turned inwards: look at the one behind you. They do not blind witnesses; but they deceive the eyes. A figure dressed in dark clothes, standing just outside that fence, would have been totally invisible against a black sky. *Now* do you see it?"

"But the murderer," exclaimed Mercier, "still had to get inside the fence in order to strike down his victim!"

"Not in this instance," said Alan. "We can understand at last why Private Saulomon and Grenadier Joyet were both killed with a straight and level thrust. We can understand why in each case the dagger seemed to have been 'carried away' from the scene of the crime. Because, in those two instances, no dagger was used at all.

"The hired killer, with a certain type of weapon in his hand,

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made one deadly and unerring thrust between two wooden palings of the fence; and he let his scrap of paper flutter through before the eyes of men who could not see it. Now look again at the dagger in your own hand; notice its flatness, its one sharp edge, and its broad blade that does not taper; and tell me finally—what does it remind you of?"

Mercier sat up and swore. "The blade of a straight sabre!" he said.

Alan rapped his knuckles on the lid of the box.

"Not only a straight sabre," he said, "but a light-cavalry sabre of a pattern carried by just one small group of men in the whole of the French Army. Well, who *is* this hired killer who loves violence for its own sake? He is a man of great physical strength; when he did use a dagger, he had to risk a fight with the sentry. He is exceptionally skilled in the use of the sabre. He is a man of immense courage, or else arrogant self-confidence—"

"Are you describing," demanded Ida, "a man exactly like yourself?"

"I am describing," retorted Alan, "a man even more like Lieutenant Hans Schneider, of the Hussars of Bercy. It was by no chance or accident, believe me, that Schneider, of all people, appeared at the Ministry of Police last night. And next, with your permission I shall try to offer you absolute proof. But do you accept, all of you, that Grenadier Joyet was probably killed in the way I say he was?"

"My friend," said Mercier, spreading out his hands, "I cannot help accepting it. The same principle, that the colour black cannot be seen against black, was demonstrated during a conjuring show at Talleyrand's house two years ago. *But* . . ."

"But what?"

"The assassin, you tell me, lunged through the fence with a sabre. Good! But sabres are of polished steel. What if some witness had seen a flash of light on the blade? Surely Captain Cut-throat would have told his tame assassin to darken the sword or paint it black?"

"He did," snapped Alan. "That is how we know the murderer is Lieutenant Schneider."

"*What?*"

"Do you really imagine," asked Alan, with a sort of kindly and sardonic fury, "that the secret agents of Lord Castlereagh have no information whatever about the Grand Army or its more notorious characters? Last night, in the Room of Mirrors, Hans Schneider was in all his glory. His uniform shone like the hope of heaven. He walloped Chavasse in the face as he would have walloped any other man on earth. He didn't fear me or a dozen like me. But he wouldn't draw his sabre—did you notice that? He wouldn't draw his sabre, that is, until I goaded him so far he had no choice. Even then, when he had lifted it only a few inches, he was damned glad of an interruption to let it drop back again. That sabre-blade was painted black."

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Alan Hepburn paused. The sweat was running down his forehead and into his eyes; the faces of his companions swam before him; all the noises of their flying passage crashed and dinned in his ears.

"Ida," he said, swallowing a lump in his throat, "think of that man's face and his temper; picture him, wherever he is now. . ."

Mercier sprang up, holding the edge of the coach door, and seemed to be staring hard at the reflector-lamp on the back wall of the coach.

"Wherever he is now!" repeated Ida in a high, strange voice. Perhaps Ida was thinking, perhaps Mercier was thinking, of a solitary horseman riding hard through the night in pursuit of the coach: a straight sabre at his side, a tight-set smile round his jaws.

But who could tell what they were thinking? Who, in this game of rapid move and counter-move, could tell what anybody was thinking?

Alan turned to Mercier. "The sword was painted black," he said, "because Schneider is ready for more killings at Captain Cut-throat's order. Now you are warned, and you may act as you like. But it is certainly one of the reasons, at least, why I don't care to be dosed with laudanum at night . . ."

"Hepburn!"

"Well?"

Mercier, holding the dagger in his left hand as though it burnt him, and clasping the coach door with his right, was still trying to stand up on the rocking floor. "I can't believe you're deceiving me in this," said Mercier, staring hard at Alan. "If there is any truth left in human nature, I don't believe you're deceiving me. Therefore," and he moistened his dust-caked lips under the dark moustache, and glanced towards the back of the coach, "there is something I must tell you."

"No!" said Ida sharply. "You're not to tell him! I forbid it!"

"But, madame—!"

"He *is* deceiving us! I know his ways! I forbid this!"

"I do not believe this is deceit, madame, and I am certain that in your heart you don't believe it, either. But if it is true," and he stared ahead, "who the devil is the real Captain Cut-throat? Who hired Schneider? Who is planning all this mummery to wreck the army?"

"I don't know," Alan admitted bitterly.

"But I understood, from certain remarks made by Fouché . . ."

"Never once did I claim to know the identity of Captain Cut-throat himself. For reasons of my own I took a long gamble and said I knew where to find the *assassin*: because the first place to look for him, clearly, was in the Hussars of Bercy, who carry a light-cavalry sabre of this pattern. Then, when Schneider appeared . . ."

"You had reason to suspect Schneider?"

"Not until that black sabre-blade jumped three inches out of its scabbard, and every fact fitted together at once. Up to that time,

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I had simply been on edge, spoiling for a fight. Afterwards, in the light of revelation, I kept looking at the sword so intently that I was afraid you would have observed me."

"And the real Captain Cut-throat?"

"The real Captain Cut-throat," said Alan, "may be anybody. It may be someone of high official position. It may be someone relatively humble. It may even conceivably be a woman—"

"A woman?"

"It would not be the first time, in France, that the motivating force behind a secret society has come from a woman. I don't know; and it doesn't matter! What we have—or what you have if anything happens to me—is a clear lead to the secret god through Schneider. We have only to keep the closest watch on Schneider . . ."

"Madame de Sainte-Elme," Mercier said formally, "I am going to tell him."

"Answer me one question, darling Guy," cried Ida, with her shoulders back and her head up in silhouette against the swinging lamp. "Do you obey the orders you are given, or do you take orders from the prisoner in your care?"

"Madame, that has ceased to be the question!"

All this time Madeleine Hepburn had said not a word. She sat tense, but trying hard to smile, while she looked sideways: first at Ida's face, then at the gold-embroidered reticule in Ida's hand.

"How can it cease to be the question," Ida was demanding of Mercier, "as long as a British spy is loose at Boulogne? Why, for instance, is Alan so interested in that other carriage?"

"What other carriage?"

"The other carriage," snapped Ida, "that Alan bribed the postilion to overtake. Why is he so concerned with someone going to Boulogne, if he is thinking only of Captain Cut-throat? Look!" she added, starting up and brushing past Madeleine to point out of the right-hand window. "We are overtaking the other carriage now!"

"It cannot be the Emperor himself on the road. Is it of any importance, madame?" Mercier gestured, shrugging.

Alan suddenly snatched the dagger from Mercier's hand, dropped it into the box, and pushed the closed box under the red, upholstered seat. Then he craned out of the window beside him, with Mercier leaning on his shoulder and gazing out, too.

"The Imperial livery?" cried Ida. "Stand aside, can't you? Stand . . ."

Inside the Forest of Hardelot it was cool, even chilly, with a damp air which for some time had stirred inside the musty coach. Ahead of them, travelling fast, was a light, closed carriage with shining green-and-gold panels; a coachman in green-and-gold livery cracked his own whip over its two horses. Four troopers of the Cuirassiers, an escort from the Emperor's heavy cavalry, rode two in front of the carriage and two behind it.

From the crests of their brass helmets, shaped in the Roman

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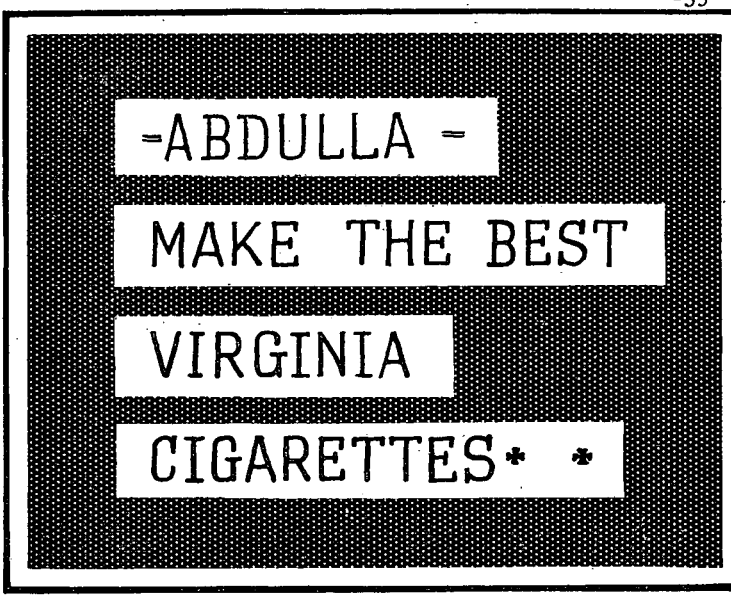

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style, streamed out long scarlet plumes. Their brass chest-and-back armour glimmered in the glow of the carriage-lamps. Long and heavy sabres jingled against blue saddle-cloths. By tradition they were the most dreaded of the cavalry: silent and moody of temper, ready for a quarrel on any pretext. And yet, as the coach thundered up to overtake the carriage, one of the troopers glanced back over his shoulder—and slightly smiled.

Alan, leaning out of the window and craning round towards the left, saw sixteen-year-old Michel and his fellow postilion. Both these youths, rigid with ecstasy or a good imitation of it, were standing straight up in their stirrups, heads back and hands stiffened at salute.

"Vive l'Empereur!" screamed Michel.

"Vive l'Empereur!" shouted his companion; and the cries rang and echoed in the spectral forest.

The Cuirassier's smile broadened under his lowering moustaches. Indulgently half returning the salute, he nodded and made a gesture with his gloved hand for the coach to pass.

"Michel," observed Mercier dryly, "is earning his gold napoleon by tribute to another—" And Mercier stopped dead.

It was not the Emperor in the closed carriage. It was someone who should have been in Paris at that time, unless . . .

For an instant, as the horse-hoofs hammered in unison and the windows of the two vehicles drew level, a face peered out of the other window. It was a withered, sharp-nosed, aristocratic face, its smile a diplomatic leer between the wings of grey hair. And Charles Maurice Talleyrand de Périgord, Foreign Minister of the French Empire, raised his hand in mock-pious blessing as the coach rocketed past.

Alan and Mercier sank back into their seats; Alan's face had grown completely expressionless. But Madeleine knew he was even more desperate than before.

"Not important, eh?" crowed Ida, shivering so much that the kerchief slipped off her dark hair. "Not important! Oh no, no! Cease your talk of Captain Cut-throat, both of you! Talleyrand is here! Can't you guess what that means? Why should Talleyrand, a cripple and a man who hates travel, be hastening to the Emperor's side at this hour? Don't you realize what they plan for tonight, of all nights?

"Captain Cut-throat has lost his gamble," cried Ida. "Forget Schneider! It does not matter now if Schneider kills fifty men. The Emperor has given the word, and in a few hours the drums will beat to arms all along the coast. This is the night of the invasion!"

The night of the invasion. Long awaited, long expected, looming closer and closer with the thunder of its final shock . . .

"And I shall not be there," said Mercier, pressing a hand against his forehead. "I shall miss it all, guarding this prisoner of ours."

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"Then guard him well, I counsel you. Tonight, of all nights, he will try to send a message to the British!"

"Madame, how the devil could he send a message to the British?"

"I don't know. But he'll try. He'll risk every bayonet on the Iron Coast to try!"

Ida's mind did not really seem concerned with what she was saying. Her dust-cloak had fallen back; before leaving Paris, she had put on a scarlet-and-black travelling-dress which, while not transparent like her evening-gown, was fully as exotic and flamboyant. The fingers of her right hand were fastened round Madeleine's left wrist; and yet Madeleine, though tense and white-faced, smiled and made no effort to wrench her wrist away.

"If you think using laudanum is unworthy of a gentleman," jeered Ida, rather implying that it *was* unworthy, "at least don't divulge to him what you proposed to tell him a few minutes ago. With that safeguard following behind us—do you understand me, Guy?—he will be as helpless as though he were tied with ropes." Here Ida broke off. "Alan! Are you up to your accursed tricks already? What have you got there?"

Alan, though still on edge, had regained all his usual suavity and his most amiable expression. From the inside pocket of his blue coat he was taking out a folded oblong of heavy paper, and carefully spreading it out on his knees.

"This is a map of the Boulogne Camp and its environs," he

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said. "You needn't look so surprised, any of you; this was also given to me by Papa Fouché himself."

"Guy!" screamed Ida. "Make him put away that map! Make him—"

"Why should I put it away?" inquired Alan, looking up.

Abruptly, as though his alert ear had caught some other noise, he craned his neck out of the window to peer at the road behind them. He was sitting back again in a flash; but, to Madeleine, his eyes seemed to have changed their colour from green to black.

"No, it's nothing!" he said, forestalling the quick questions. "We must be sure Talleyrand is not delayed, that's all; and he's still there. Nothing is likely to happen, is it, until he's at the Emperor's side? At the present time we are travelling north and still going uphill. But at any moment we'll be going downhill, and shortly we'll emerge from the forest . . ."

"Well?"

"Emerge from the forest," Alan tapped the map, "into a valley where there is a village called Condette. Look here! On our right, beyond and above several kilometres of open fields, will lie the Forest of Boulogne.

"In the Forest of Boulogne, hidden in a very large open clearing, is the Field of the Balloons. Those are the balloons the Emperor means to use for his invasion. Well, isn't it evident—?"

Interrupting him with a curt gesture, Mercier turned round and darted out his hand. "Hepburn, don't force me to threaten you

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with the pistol. I can afford to take no chances. Give me the map!"

"As you please," replied Alan after a hard-breathing pause. Carefully he folded up the map and handed it over. "Perhaps, after you've heard what I have to say, you'll return it."

"I doubt that. What did you want to say?"

"Estimates as to the number of the Emperor's force," said Alan, "vary from a thousand balloons, each with a car carrying ten men—to a hundred balloons, each carrying the same number of men—which is more probable. In either event, given a favourable wind, such as there is tonight . . ."

"Don't you feel the motion of the coach?" said Madeleine, sitting up. "We're on our way downhill now."

"Very well! Once downhill and out of this wood, we should be able to see the Forest of Boulogne as plain as print on the other side of the open fields. If there are lights inside the forest, if the balloons are fully inflated—and we can't help seeing them above the trees—it's a fairly sure sign the Emperor is on the move at last."

"What I can't understand," muttered Mercier, "is the criminal negligence of Papa Fouché in presenting you with a map at the outset."

"Can't you?" said Ida. "I can!"

She flared out in a frenzy of inspiration that caught them all with its heat and fervour. Her high cheek-bones, her long and full-lipped mouth, shared with those narrow eyes a vividness of personality that had in it almost a touch of the insane.

"I knew from the beginning," said Ida, "Fouché was playing some double game! This is the only thing that explains it all. Joseph Fouché hates the Emperor; he has never lost his revolutionary principles; he sees advantage to himself if the Empire cracks. He called Schneider to Paris, and all but went into a fit when Schneider tried to draw that sword." Convulsively Ida gripped Mercier's knee. "Tonnerre de dieu, it can't be anything else! The Minister of Police is Captain Cut-throat!"

The coach was rushing downhill in a clatter and clank of the swingle-bar. Ida, in the certainty of her inspiration, turned her eyes towards Alan—and stopped dead at his richly sardonic look.

"This is true," she cried, "isn't it?"

"No," Alan replied, with great distinctness. "Did you fall into that trap, too?"

"What?"

"I nearly fell into it myself," said Alan. "It might have been designed to trip an investigator. Fouché would mock the Emperor; he might even defy the Emperor . . ."

"Well, then!"

"But he's not Captain Cut-throat, because he is too cautious ever to plot treason unless someone else initiates it."

"Then who is Captain Cut-throat?"

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"A moment ago," retorted Alan, "you were saying it didn't matter. Speaking personally, to me it doesn't matter at all. But it must matter to you as a Frenchwoman that someone at Boulogne —someone using methods that are crude and showy but effective— will continue giving orders for people to be stabbed in the back, perhaps orders to kill the Emperor himself at the hour of the invasion. So we can agree, I think, that following Schneider is just as important as it ever was. Mercier!"

"Yes?"

"When we come out into the valley, we shall be very near Pont-de-Briques. Exactly where is the Park of Thirty Statues?"

"Very close. We can't be far away from it now."

"And I suppose, if this is the night of the invasion, they'll insist on holding both you and me indoors? Who is our hostess?"

"A woman—*Steady, Michel!*—a woman called the Duchess."

"What duchess?"

"She isn't a real duchess; it's a nickname; and she is quite a character. No, she won't hold you indoors; and neither will the servants nor the two sentries of the Guard who are always there. But *I* intend to keep you indoors whatever happens."

"Mercier, listen to me!"

"Hepburn, I beg you not to argue! You will leave that house only if I am dead!"

"But, man, is there no getting away from your decision? For instance, could I appeal to the Emperor himself?"

"At a time like this? Impossible! If, as you say, the signal will be given tonight—" Mercier stopped, catching his breath. All, with one impulse, craned towards the right-hand window.

Though the coach still rocked and plunged, they were warned by the different sound as they swept out from under the trees into the open air and gradually slowed to a steadier pace. It was dark, in the brooding hush of a sultry night, but with that greyish light in which blacker shapes can just be distinguished close at hand. North-eastwards, on high-rising ground fully two miles away, a long, dark blur marked the treetops of Boulogne Forest.

Alan had badly misjudged his distances. They were too far away and it was too dark to make out with any clearness the details he said he had hoped to see. But there could be no mistaking those acres of firefly glimmers moving low against tall trees, or above the trees the vague shimmer of colour where acres of gaudily painted monster shapes swayed in readiness. The balloons for the invasion, however many of them had been commissioned, were fully inflated and tugged hard at their guy ropes.

"Madame Hepburn!" Mercier said: not loudly, but in so odd a tone that Madeleine's heart jumped. "Madame Hepburn, please change places with me, and sit beside your husband. Do not argue or hesitate, I beg of you! Do as I ask!"

Whereupon Madeleine, who had never turned her gaze from Alan, received an even worse shock. Alan, though all attention, was not looking at those monster shapes at all.

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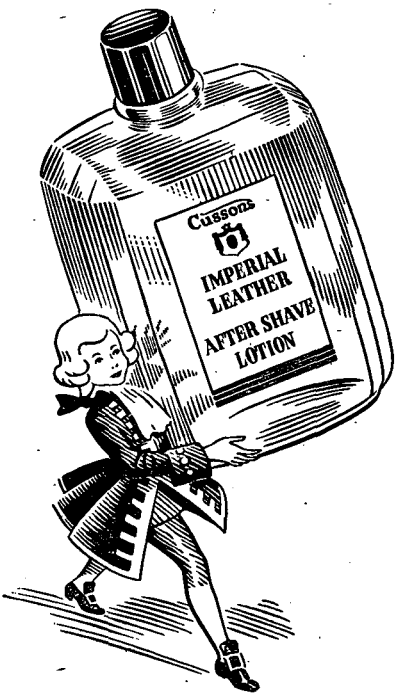

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Craned far round, he was looking back over his shoulder in the direction of Boulogne itself. Through the Forest of Boulogne dimly showed another kind of light: a light as though along a road, faint and reddish from lanterns or torches, but a long line distinctly moving southward. And Alan's fists clenched . . .

" Madame Hepburn! "

" I—I beg your pardon! " said Madeleine. Instinctively speaking in a whisper, because Mercier himself now spoke in a whisper, she stumbled past him and sank into the seat beside Alan.

She had forgotten her coach-bruised body and the aching cramp of her knees and back. Now Mercier had seen the moving lights, or perhaps he had observed them from the first; and Madeleine's thoughts spun in circles.

Invasion, yes! Portentous events taking shape in the night, without a betraying drumbeat or a sound from afar. But what, exactly, did this particular move mean?

" I think, Hepburn," Mercier said abruptly, " you have seen enough." Raising his hand to the centre window above the coach door, he drew down the blind sharply. Then he pulled down the other two right-hand blinds, covering the open panels beside the seats on that side.

" Madame de Sainte-Elme," he added, " will you be good enough to draw all three blinds on your side? "

" But we'll stifle! " said Ida, making fierce fanning motions. " There's no air in this coach as it is. We'll stifle! "

" Then we stifle," said Mercier. " At least, for the short time until we reach the Park of Statues. Do as I tell you! "

" And what is the meaning," demanded Ida, " of that moving line of light? What *is* it? Why are you both looking so strange? "

" Our friend has already guessed," said Mercier, " what is happening tonight. Will you pull down the blinds, madame, or must I do it myself? "

Down came the blinds on the other side, while Ida cursed like an ostler, and they were sealed into darkness except for the yellow flame of the reflector-lamp swinging against the rear wall.

Nobody spoke. Mercier, with the pistol in his hand and the map thrust between two gold buttons of his partly undone waistcoat, stared across at Alan while the coach raced forward towards its last stop . . . At five minutes to eleven o'clock, over coffee at the end of dinner, something happened that gave the events of that night their final and most deadly turn.

The Third Part of " Black Sabre," by John Dickson Carr, appears in next month's Argosy on sale June 10th.

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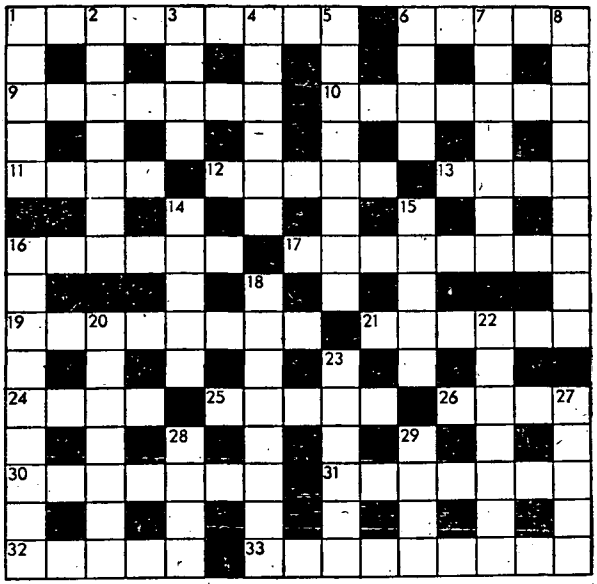

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CUT ALONG THE LINE

CLUES

Across

1 A public relations officer will sell anything—it's his food and drink (9).

2 An old salt ? (5).

9 Even the most retiring could put up with this (7).

10 Will the landlord lose his grip on the lease ? (7).

11 Ward off ; leaving part of the contents of the cupboard behind (4).

12 A hill in England becomes a port in Scotland (5).

13 Landlubbers can be it, too (4).

16 If father doubles back about the street, he changes his status (6).

17 Attach it to a belt to get around in industry (8).

19 This heady combination is no safeguard (8).

21 The Territorials proceed in a wavering line—this calls for settlement (6).

24 "Far on the ringing plains of windy —" (Tennyson) (4).

25 An infant strayed in travelling through Ur—he needs a guardian (5).

26 The right angle for a purser (4).

30 Headgear calculated to soothe the fevered brow (3-4).

31 With 2 down, it's hardly suitable reading for the train (7).

32 When you have the right of it, you need no force (5).

33 Don't wash all your dirty linen—dry-clean some of it (4-5).

Down

1 No pay, no say ; this mercenary player makes me reel (5).

2 The transport's all in (7).

3 Money's at the root of it (4).

4 This bonny fechter takes the cake (6).

5 Sir Otto D. in disguise at public assemblies (8).

6 British version of Swan river, perhaps ? (4).

7 If this lad keeps on growing, he'll be on the tiles (7).

8 The quarters are close to this edifice (9).

14 These animals can be hard pressed (5).

15 Even tea can be an occasion (5).

16 Further your suit with patience or win her with a ring (9).

18 A cad's cure is doomed (8).

20 It takes little to make a modest plant rampant (7).

22 Not mulish, just foolish (7).

23 One of these was Halley's (6).

27 I'll have ten each way, on principle (5).

28 Fleet, but not of foot (4).

29 You might see it in a postscript, perhaps in mine (4).

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